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California Joe's

War Trail;

OR,

THE MINNESOTA MASSACRE.

A Sequel to "California Joe's First Trail."

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "THE SEA-CAT," "THE DUMB PAGE,"
"THE TIGER TAMER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW.

THE plains of the Northwest stretched abroad, monotonous and smooth, carpeted with short grass, of a greenish gray, fading away into a dusty brown, as the hot sun scorched it into dry tufts, that looked as if they could tempt the appetite of no animal.

JOE GAVE ANOTHER WHOOP, AND TURNING HIS HORSE, YELLED AS HE SHOT AHEAD:
"NOW BOYS, ROOT HOG OR DIE!"

High overhead soared a great King-Vulture, his orange head and neck, and the bright colors of his plumage, shining out in strong contrast to the dusky wings and sooty apparel of the common turkey-buzzards, circling to and fro, without motion of wing or tail, as the fowl birds eagerly scanned the prairie below them, in quest of carrion.

It was the battle summer of 1862, when the great storm of war, in the older and settled States, had stripped the plains of their usual lines of marching wagons.

Nevertheless, the soaring vultures saw something, or they would not have been gathering from all quarters, as they were, sweeping low, in graceful circles.

A keen observer might have noticed that their attention was divided from the fact that they were gathering in two flocks, about twenty miles apart, in both of which places the prairie was marked with a maze of diverging lines, that revealed the existence of "bad lands."

These dark lines resembled the cracks in a plowed field, where the heavy clay is torn apart by the heat of the sun, and the rifts extend in all directions.

The country was covered with a maze of ravines, that ran hither and thither in the wildest confusion, the sides of the ravines being for the most part perpendicular, and varying from a foot or two, to hundreds of feet in depth.

Some were cracks, not more than three feet wide; others stretched into gullies no horse could leap.

The sides of a few sloped, but most were sheer precipices; while the bottoms of all were marked by beds of sand, that had accumulated from the washings of the sides.

Into one of these "bad lands" a herd of buffalo, with a little knot of Indian hunters hanging on its rear, was rushing, by a well-worn path, pursued for centuries by nomadic multitudes; while, at the edge of the other system of ravines, twenty miles off, two men were watching the approach of a war-party of Indians, coming on at a gallop, whipping their ponies and evidently making for them.

The vultures, being gifted with the keenest of sight, saw all this, and more too.

In the midst of these bad lands into which the buffalo were plunging, at the bottom of a ravine, sheltered from sight, a small fire had been lighted; and a party of five people, all white, two of them women, was encamped—the mules of the party being tethered near them.

The two men at the other place mentioned as watching the Indians, were white scouts of the plains, while the party of five had the aspect, unmistakable in those days, of Union fugitives from the Southern States, coming North to get under the protection of the old flag.

The vultures, being well versed in the sights and sounds of the Northwest, knew that the meeting of white and red always meant a fight, with probable pickings for birds that live on slaughter.

The odds were largely in favor of the red-men, this time; for there were but seven of the whites, counting all, of which only four were able-bodied men, while there were thirty or forty Indians, already at the edge of the bad lands, and the vultures could see, (what the white men could not), that hundreds more of the savages were on the march toward the center of attraction, while their signal-fires were puffing smoke in a dozen different directions, over the seamed prairie.

The time was one when mercy was the last thing to expect from an Indian toward a white man, for the great Minnesota Massacre had taken place, and every Indian on the plains had heard that the "Great Father" in Washington was in trouble with his children, and all the red-men hoped that the time had come to regain the land their fathers had lost.

Help for the white people, there was none, nearer than Fort Blake, on the other side of the Missouri river, a good thirty miles away, the country between being entirely occupied by the Indians, who roamed up to the banks of the river, and made scorn of the green garrison, knowing very well that the recruits and volunteers, gathered there under the orders of old General S., had never been in an Indian fight in their lives, and being also aware that the regulars they had been accustomed to fear had all been sent to the East to fight the rebellious children of the Great Father.

Four men against hundreds, and the four divided! Only two could be depended on to meet the shock of the wily and desperate foe, and defend the helpless women they had in charge.

Yet the two hunters, who were the nearest to immediate danger, did not seem excited or

alarmed at the perilous position in which they were placed. One of them had lighted a short wooden pipe, and was smoking as coolly as if danger was nowhere near. Both he and his pard were well armed with breech-loading rifles, and each carried a pair of revolvers in his belt; but what were they against the odds coming to meet them?

Yet they seemed tranquil, and as the smoker took the first pull at his pipe, he observed:

"Jack Corbett, ef it warn't fur the pore critters behind us, darned ef I'd ax better fun than we're gwine to have. We'll make them red cusses know they kurn't fool with Californy Joe."

California Joe was already known as one of the best scouts on the plains, where he had made his camping-ground ever since the mining excitement in California had taken him, a green boy, from Missouri, and made a warrior out of him at twenty-one.

A grand figure of a man, six-foot-two in his moccasins, weighing "a cool two hundred," of bone and sinew; gaunt, lean, hard as iron, with the same humorous twinkle in his eye, and the same passion for smoking perpetually, at all times and places, that he had when he fell into the hands of Deacon Simplicity, twelve years before, and fought his way out from among the Mormon Destroying Angels.*

Brave and self-denying as ever, he and his partner, Jack Corbett, had chanced on the party of Union fugitives the night before, trying to get to Fort Blake, and had volunteered to lead the Indians away from them, if not to bring them triumphantly into the lines of the fort, in spite of the foes that swarmed around.

A perilous task, as Jack Corbett remarked, when he saw the Indians approaching.

"Joe," he said thoughtfully, "I'm thinkin' that if we save our own ha'r, it's all we kin do. I'm afeard the lootenant and the ladies is gone up, ef those cusses sets eyes on 'em."

Joe emitted a great puff from his pipe.

"I've b'en in hoels afore this, Jack Corbett; and I allers got out of 'em. When aour time to git wiped out comes, we kurn't stop it; but, till it comes, all the Injuns on the plains kurn't bring it a minute nigher."

And with this statement of his simple fatalistic faith, he regretfully shook the ashes from his pipe, returned it to his pocket, and took up his rifle, as the foremost Indian came within a quarter of a mile of the ravine, in front of which he was standing.

"Time to git the *muels* in," he remarked, next, as coolly as if it were an ordinary necessity; and with that he took the long lariat by which his own animal was confined, and led the mule into the mouth of the ravine, Jack following his example, sure that the animals could not escape.

That done, the two scouts lay down by the mouth of the ravine, and calmly awaited the approach of their foes.

They had not long to wait; for the Indians, in the confidence of overwhelmingly superior numbers, came on at full speed, yelling like devils as if determined to ride down the puny resistance of two men.

But, as the two evinced no sign of fear, and kept their rifles pointed, without firing, the daring of the foe gave place to discretion. Just as they came within gunshot, every Indian dipped over the side of his horse, diverging from the straight track, and swept past the scouts, at less than fifty yards, all the braves hanging behind their ponies, and going in a long irregular string, at full gallop.

The fight was beginning, and the vultures watched it eagerly, waiting their prey.

CHAPTER II.

A LITTLE SCRIMMAGE.

NEITHER of the scouts fired as the Indians advanced. They knew better than to throw away a shot against enemies like those before them, who only asked for such a chance.

They allowed the vaunting warriors to sweep past, yelling out opprobrious epithets as they went, from behind the safe shelter of their horses' bodies.

The whole band passed and turned, to come back the other way. As they did so, they were compelled to rise and pass over the backs of their horses to get a shelter on the other side. The opportunity was a good one to fire, but not

* See "California Joe's First Trail," to which this tale may be called a sequel.

It must also be remarked that Joe was a real character, and a great friend of Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill Hikok. He was the favorite scout of the late General Custer. Jack Corbett and he served together for many years under that officer.

yet did the cool scouts avail themselves of the chance.

The Indians had changed, but too far off for a sure shot; and they wanted the red-men to become careless.

A second time they swept by, within twenty yards of the place where the two scouts lay.

Both grasped their pieces, and took a good aim.

The ponies came at the same breakneck speed, but as they passed the place where the two men lay, there was a perceptible slackening of the pace.

Once it seemed as if they were about to halt and drop their riders, but at the critical moment the courage of the Indians failed them, and they went on again.

Once more they changed, and this time well within gunshot.

As the dark figures leaped up in the saddles for that instant, a sheet of flame burst from Joe's rifle, and one of the Indians threw up his arms and dropped from his pony.

Then, with a wild yell of fury, they came on for the third time, and rushed down on the mouth of the ravine as if they had mustered resolution to charge home at last; but before they got there, Joe had crammed a fresh cartridge into his rifle, and, as the rush neared the mouth of the ravine, he and his partner fired together, then dropped their rifles and grasped their revolvers.

The effect of the shots was to throw two ponies headlong on the grass. Their riders, with an active spring, vaulted on the backs of others, behind other riders, as they were running; but the charge was checked, and the whole body scampered away, baffled in their design, and leaving two ponies behind them, while the body of the slain man was carried off and dropped on the grass out of gunshot.

Then the Indians paused, and held a short conference, which resulted in their lighting a fire and making a smoke signal, which the beleaguered scouts watched, with no pleasant feelings.

"The darned ornary galoots!" said Joe, in a tone of great disgust. "Ain't got men enough, ten to one; but they want more. Ef it were only jest dark, we could warm those ducks."

Jack nodded, but remarked quietly:

"Tain't more'n about noon yet, and they kin do a heap of fightin', afore sundown, Joe."

The remark seemed to displease Joe; for his countenance assumed a gloomy cast, as he answered, with asperity:

"You're allers makin' the wu'st of things, Jack. Darn your skin, ef I had as little cheek as you, I'd go drown myself."

Jack seemed to be nettled at the remark.

"Tain't cheek, wanted here; it's grit. Ef you kin beat me at that, with yer old Tennessee, let's see ye do it. Varmount kin stand the press, any day; and don't you furgit it, Joe."

Joe seemed to be mollified, for he began to laugh, in his light-hearted way.

"Waal, 'tain't no use you and me quar'lin' about nothen', Jack. We got to do a heap of fightin' yit, and mebbe t'won't be Varmount, nor Tennessee nuther, that's gurne to git aout with a hull skin. 'Tween you and me, I wish it was dark."

"So do I, pard," declared Jack, more amicably, "but wishin' ain't havin', or we'd be *mil-linaires*. I don't b'lieve they'll git thar friends to come afore dark, anyway; and they darsn't try and rush us, till they gits fifty, at least."

Joe made no reply, but lay there, watching the Indians, who had dismounted from their ponies and staked them, while the riders sat in a circle on the grass, talking together.

No variation was made in this programme for another hour; when Jack Corbett, who was watching in the opposite direction from Joe, nudged the Tennessean; and they saw, far away on the other side of the system of ravines that formed the bad lands, another party of Indians.

The situation had now become decidedly grave, for they knew it was in the power of the Indians to enter the ravines on either side, and so take them in front and rear at once.

But plainsmen are hard to surprise, and Joe had anticipated just such a state of things.

"Jack," he said coolly. "One of us two has got to keep the other eend of this. Which'll it be?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Darned ef I care. You go. I want to stay hyar an see this sarcus through."

Joe, without another word, drew his body back till he was out of sight of the Indians on the plain outside, and stole off down the ravine to his mule.

Mounting the animal, he rode off at a trot, and, in less than ten minutes after, was at the other end of the system of furrows, with his eyes bent on the advancing forms of a dozen or more Indians, who were coming on at a walk, as if in no special hurry.

Joe took his place at the entrance of a ravine, and prepared himself for a siege.

He had plenty of ammunition, and had been in the place before. He knew all its intricacies, and, among other things, that there was a third place, by which exit or entrance could be made by a man on foot, though it was not practicable to one who was mounted.

He felt confidence in his ability to keep off the dozen Indians coming toward him, as long as daylight lasted; and he knew that Indians do not like to fight in the dark, on account of their superstition, that a man who gets killed at night, will be in night all the rest of his existence, in the next world.

The men, coming toward him, were not aware of his presence, as he saw, from the careless way in which they rode. The Indians at the other side had seen him and his partner enter the bad lands; but these men could not be aware that he had seen them coming; for he had kept in cover all the time, and now was lying under the shelter of the edge of a ravine, his head hidden under a tuft of grass.

He had his rifle by him, and had drawn one of his long pistols, which lay ready to his hand.

He knew that it was good for nearly a hundred yards, and had resolved to make the most of his first fire.

Slowly the Indians advanced, laughing and talking to each other as they came; but, as they got near to the entrance of the bad lands, they stopped their clamor, and behaved more like warriors on the war-path.

It was in a line, and with their rifles at the advance, that they had finally approached the dark streak in the prairie.

He saw that they did not expect anything there, but had taken a defensive attitude, from the mere traditions of their tribe.

He waited patiently till the foremost was well within pistol range, when he took a careful aim, and fired, with the result of tumbling the warrior from his saddle, and throwing the whole line into confusion.

The rest of the Indians poured in a hasty and ill-directed fire, and thus gave Joe the opportunity to snatch up his revolver, and send three more shots into the ranks, before they broke and fled in confusion.

Then the reckless scout laughed to himself in solitary glee; for he saw that they had been so much demoralized by the unexpected assault that they had actually left two dead men on the ground, and that two ponies were trotting toward the edge of the ravine, without riders, scared by the firing and not knowing where to go.

He lay still where he was, and the animals actually went into the ravine behind him, when he gave a whoop, which sent them off at a gallop into the recesses of the bad lands, and Joe cried aloud:

"Got 'em, by gum! That settles your hash, Mr. Injun."

But he knew too well the nature of the Indian warrior to show himself.

There lay the two dead warriors on the grass; and the enraged Indians were gathering, out of gunshot, to make a dash and recover the bodies, according to their notions of the honors of war.

He managed to get his rifle reloaded before they came on again; but had to be content with what charges were left in his pistol; which required time and care to refill.

Presently they came on at a tearing gallop, and, as they passed by his hiding-place, dipped from their saddles to pick up the nearest body.

Joe fired as they executed the maneuver, and had the satisfaction of seeing one of them waver in the saddle, and let go; riding off as if he was badly hurt.

Another warrior, however, caught up the body by one arm, and it was carried away by two men.

A second rally at a greater distance, and then down they came, reduced to nine men, now, two of whom rode ahead, firing as fast as they could, as they came toward him. He noticed that these two had revolvers, then quite uncommon among Indians. All carried bows at their backs, and their rifles were of the old-fashioned kind, muzzle-loading and small-bored.

CHAPTER III.

A NIGHT MARCH.

Joe's assailants looked savage and determined enough, as they came on, at full gallop.

Without flinching in the least, they dashed up close to him, jumped off their horses, and tried to take him by storm.

Had Joe lost his coolness in that moment, it would have been all up with him; but he waited till he had the leader sure, when he shot him down with his rifle, and then jumped up, with a revolver in each hand, and blazed away into their faces, with such quick and accurate aim, that they wavered, fell back, and ran to their horses, after exchanging a few shots.

He discovered, in that brief skirmish, that the pistols among them were only two, while the rest of the warriors had bows and arrows for close fighting, which they used to such good effect that he had his clothing full of holes, and had been grazed by more than one arrow, though, luckily, he had received no disabling wound.

But the rush was checked, he had dropped another Indian, and knew that they would not dare to repeat the visit.

Indians are not apt to follow a losing game long.

He saw them halt, out on the prairie, and sit down in a circle, whence, before long, rose up another of the smokes that had appeared at intervals, as signals to other Indians, that might be in the neighborhood.

Joe watched them quietly; but he ground his teeth as he muttered to himself:

"Think to git me that-a-way, do ye? Waal, I'll git squar' with ye, yet, ye painted skunks. See if I don't."

He lay there and watched the sun, as it sloped toward the west while his besiegers still remained seated, watching the mouth of the ravine.

Their signal-fire was answered from more than one place, and Joe realized that there must be a whole tribe, out on the war-path.

But he saw no signs of help coming, though he scanned the plain carefully.

The sun sunk lower, and at last, just as it touched the horizon, Joe rose up in his place, so as to show himself to the Indians, as they squatted round their fires, and gave a loud yell, taunting and sarcastic.

It had the result he had expected, for they jumped up, and he sent a shot from his rifle, into the midst of the group, knocking the dirt over them; the distance being too great for accurate aim.

As he had expected, they replied with a volley, delivered with more haste than discretion, and several bullets pattered in the dirt round him, none hitting him.

Then Joe took off his cap, withdrawing behind the edge of the ravine, and deliberately set to work to rig up a dummy, that should take his place.

He put a clod into the cap; made several false movements, as the light faded gradually away, to give the Indians the impression that he was still there; then dropped behind the screen of earth, and stole away to rejoin his comrade.

The night had fallen quite dark, by the time he got to Jack, and the low signal he gave was answered, as he came up and whispered:

"Anything new?"

"They hain't moved sence you went. What was that firing?"

"Me. Rubbed aout five of the darned skunks."

"Good for you!"

"And say, Jack—"

"What is it?"

"Got two ponies—good ones too—in the bad lands. S'pose we try to run the lines and git aout into the plain? We kin leave the muels."

"I'm agreeable, if you air. But we cain't git aout this side."

"Why not?"

"'Cause thar's more'n twenty of the skunks, and that's too much odds. Haow many is thar on the other eend?"

"Eight."

Jack reached out his hand in the dark, with the brief remark:

"Shake, pard."

Then the two men stole off in the darkness into the depths of the ravines, and soon heard the hoofs of the ponies they were in search of, as the poor brutes wandered disconsolately in the gullies, trying to find some place where there was a blade of grass.

The sound guided them, and they had no trouble in getting the animals; for the paths were so narrow that there was no escape for them.

They found and mounted them when Joe observed:

"Thar's a place, hyar, whar we could git aout and not have no fightin' to do, but I'm afeard that we c'u'dn't take the hosses with us. We mou't try."

"Sartain," was the response. "Ef the wu'st comes to the wu'st, we kin allers make a dash."

So they hunted round in the dark till they came to the place which Joe had meant, where they rode up to the edge of a dry wall of clay, about seven feet high. By standing up in their saddles, they could look over the edge of the bank, and see that the prairie all round them was still and solitary, while the light of the camp-fires of the Indians, at either entrance of the bad lands, shone clear afar off.

For themselves to climb out was easy enough; but getting the ponies up was another thing altogether.

Jack, being an ingenious Vermonter, suggested the way at last. They rode the ponies to the very end of the narrow crack, till they could get no further, and were wedged fast between two walls of clay. Both men got up in the saddles, standing, and took with them the lariats which they had found coiled on the horns of the Indians' saddles.

Both took hold and hauled away, encouraging the animals to try and climb.

With anything less intelligent and hardy than an Indian pony, the attempt would have failed; but the animals seemed to comprehend what was required of them, and made frantic efforts to scramble up the side of the declivity, aided by the united force of both men.

Neither of the ponies weighed more than eight hundred pounds, and both men were strong and able, so that the task was accomplished at last, and both stood on the level prairie by the sides of their masters, when Joe chuckled to himself, saying:

"Won't them red galoots be sold when they come to s'arch in the mornin'? They kin have the muels."

Jack returned the chuckle, and the two men mounted and rode off at a walk, peering through the gloom as they went.

They had escaped one great peril, but others were all around them, and they blessed the darkness of night for the shelter it gave them.

They knew that the prairie was full of Indian parties, of more or less strength, and that none of them would make fires; so that they were liable to stumble on such a party at any moment.

But both men had been in hazardous positions before, and had got through safe; so that they went forward confidently enough.

The night was not so dark but they could see moving objects on the grass, and they took their course straight by the stars for the fort they hoped to reach before daylight.

The ponies stepped out with all the vigor of their race, and they pursued their way for several hours without meeting anything, till all at once Joe's horse began to snort and whinny, and the scout instantly threw himself from the saddle and grasped the nostrils of the animal, muttering to Jack:

"Stop your brute, or they'll have the Injuns on us in the shake of a lamb's tail."

Corbett followed his example, and the two scouts stood by their horses in anxious silence for several minutes, listening for any sound that might indicate the presence of the enemy, which the scent of the ponies had already discovered.

All was silent, and at last Joe whispered: "Whoever they be, they ain't near by. Lead the beasts forrard."

They stole forward, leading the ponies, and in this way proceeded for about a mile further, when the animals began to fidget again.

At this they turned their course, and led them off to the east, till the quiet way in which they went on showed that the scent of strange horses no longer disturbed them.

Then at last the two mounted and rode on at a more rapid pace, taking the eastern course, and meeting with no more trouble till Jack's pony began to snort again and I cried recklessly:

"Let's make a dash for it! Darn the Injuns, anyhaow. We kin cut aour way through 'em in the dark, or we ain't no men at all."

Jack seemed to acquiesce in the notion, for he gave the rein to his mount, and they swept on a little further at a gallop, till the gleam of water ahead greeted them, and Jack exclaimed:

"That's what the brutes was snortin' abaout. It's the river, by gum!"

A few minutes later they were riding down to the river, and their horses dashed into the water and drank in a thirsty, eager way that showed how they had wanted water all this time.

The two scouts never relaxed their vigilance as they let the ponies drink.

Their eyes were scanning the banks of the river all the time, and it was well they did so,

for, almost before the horses had finished their first draught, moving forms were coming toward them at a gallop, and the flashes of firearms told that they had been seen.

"Swim for it!" cried Joe, as he turned his pony's head out into the river.

CHAPTER IV. THE VOLUNTEERS.

THE scouts knew well enough where they were, for the Missouri is too big a stream to be mistaken for anything else, when it is reached.

The turbid current swept the horses off their feet almost as soon as they turned out into the stream, and the bullets whistled round the heads of the riders, as they struggled to gain the further shore.

But the night was dark and the current swift; while the people on the bank, firing at them, did not seem to be very good marksmen.

Within a few minutes, the bullets went wider of the mark, and the two scouts knew they were safe from that peril, though the other, of drowning, was different.

It was hard work keeping afloat at all, for the river was swollen from recent rains, somewhere high up its course, and logs and trees came drifting down rendering it difficult to avoid them.

Joe and his plucky comrade allowed their ponies to swim with the current for some distance, crossing it diagonally, and aiming to reach the further bank, lower down than the and wider place where they plunged in; but they were carried much further than they had intended, and when they at last touched bottom, Joe observed:

"Waal, that were a tough swim, pard."

Jack made no answer; for he was peering through the darkness ahead of him, to see if the bank on which they had arrived was tenanted by any one else.

The two men stood by their horses, dismounting to allow the tired animals to rest, and listened as well as watched, till Joe who was never happy unless he had his pipe in his mouth, drew out that indispensable appendage, filled it, and was about to strike a light, when Jack exclaimed:

"What in thunder air you arter? D'ye want to git all the country daown on ye, by showin' sich a glim? This ain't no time to smoke."

Joe continued to stuff the tobacco into the bowl, and when he had it filled to his mind, he observed indifferently:

"Don't keer a darn, ef all the Injuns on the plains sees me. Thar ain't none on this side of the river; and it's jest as well they should see whar we got to."

So saying, he lighted the pipe, and the first gleam of the match was followed, as he had expected by a faint yell from the other side of the river, showing that he had been seen.

Then he threw the match into the water, and mounted his pony, saying to Jack:

"Look-a-here, sonny, I warn't born yesterday; and I've been on the plains a heap longer'n you. When I do a thing, I mean it. Come on, and keep yer eyes peeled."

Jack, who was much younger, and had not been on the plains more than a year or two, while Joe's experience dated from the old California mining excitement, followed his example; but continued to grumble at the useless way his brother scout had attracted attention to them, by his bravado of lighting his pipe.

Joe made no answer, contrary to his usual custom, and seemed to have forgotten his loquacity, but continued to ride ahead at a rapid pace, going up-stream all the time, till he suddenly halted, causing his companion to do the same, and held up his hand, asking:

"D'ye hyar that, Jack Corbett?"

They listened, and heard distinctly the patter of horses' feet at a sharp trot, with a jingling sound that caused Jack to exclaim:

"Sogers, by gum!"

He had heard and recognized the clanking of the cavalry sabers, worn by the new troops, just raised for the punishment of the Indians who had been engaged in the Minnesota massacre; and, within a few minutes more, they saw the dark forms of horsemen coming toward them, and Joe said quickly:

"Don't ye stir, Jack. The greenies won't believe but what we're Injuns, and mou't fire at us. Keep still, an' let 'em come up to us."

The two scouts halted where they were, and saw a body of men, in column of twos, riding at a trot, but passing them in a way that showed they had not caught sight of either of the strangers. The scout laughed in his quiet way, as he whispered:

"Naow, ef we was only Injuns, what a time we mou't hev with those fellers! I c'd take one of 'em, and they'd never know whar the shot came from."

Jack, whose disposition was more saturnine, growled:

"More shame for the Guv'nment to send aout sich a gang, to fight the Injuns. Why, ef the Sioux ever gits at 'em, they'll wipe 'em out."

California Joe shook his head.

"Thar's a hull grist of 'em, they say, enough to snatch the hull tribe of the Sioux bald-headed, and give 'em all the rope fur accidents they want. Besides, old Steady-go-easy* ain't the man to let the Injuns ketch him nappin'. Reckin it's time we hollered."

So saying, he raised a shout, which caused an instantaneous halt from the party of trotting cavalry, and a confusion which augured badly for their discipline; for they got into a huddle and began to talk to each other, while the two scouts, had they been 'so minded, might have fired at them and fled, with a good chance of escape.

But such was not their intention; and Joe, as soon as the excitement had quieted down, repeated his shout, and called out in English:

"Hi! We're white men! What in blazes is the matter with ye? This-a-way! Hi! This-a-way!"

Then they heard the voice of the leader of the party, shouting out:

"Advance carbines, you fools! Do you want to be scalped, without a fight for it?"

And, as if the shout had recalled some presence of mind to the party, the men got into a line, and began a slow and cautious advance, in the direction of the scouts, while Jack Corbett muttered:

"By gum, Joe, I b'lieve the darned fools is gwine to shoot at us."

"No, they ain't," replied Joe, watching the maneuver carefully. "You keep still, and I'll manage the biz."

Then he lifted his voice, crying:

"We're friends! Don't fire at us! Who's captain of your party, thar?"

"Keep on your advance, and if you see a sign of treachery, fire, men!" was the unpromising reply of the officer in command of the party on which they had run so unceremoniously. "It may be only an Indian trick."

It was rather a nervous thing to stay where the two scouts were, and allow the approaching party to come near them, knowing, as they did, that the men were recruits, and likely to fire at any moment, from mere inexperience.

But Joe had seen them before, and had the nerve to wait till they got close enough to recognize faces, even in the dark, when he said to the leader of the party:

"Ain't that Lootenant Braown, of Indianny?"

"Why, yes," returned the other, with an accent of surprise. "Who are you, then? We took you for Indians."

Joe burst into a laugh.

"The blazes ye did, lootenant! Waal, all I kin say is this: Ef we'd ha' b'en Injuns, we c'd hev hed all your sculps, and you never know what hit ye, till ye got the bullet. I'm Californy Joe; and I reckon you've h'ard the name afore. Haow fur air we from the fort?"

The reply seemed to banish all fears; for the young officer—he was but a lad of twenty—immediately answered, in rather a shame-faced way:

"Why, so it is, and I never knew your voice. How do you do, Joe? The fact is, the general sent us out to look for you."

"The blazes he did!" said Jack Corbett, with an expression of great contempt. "Seems to me he mou't hev sent some one used to Injun ways. You're the greenest I ever see."

"I'd have you know, sir, that I am an officer, and that you will have to treat me with proper respect!" interposed the young leader, with some asperity. "Mr. Joe I know; but I don't know you."

"Oh, I'm well known," said Jack, in a surly tone. "I'm Jack Corbett, and all I have to say is this: if the general takes sich men as you've got here to night after the Injuns, he's going to get left. That's all."

And Jack retreated into himself in sulky silence, while Joe, who was more affable and good-natured as well as loquacious, put in soothingly:

"It ain't to be expected that a young feller on his fu'st scaout is to know everything, Jack. I heerd the lootenant, and he did fu'st-rate, as soon as he got over the flurry. Naow, lootenant, ef

you're agreeable, we kin go to the fort; fur I have suthin' to tell the gin'ral."

Mr. Brown made no objection, and they turned their horses and rode off, following the course that Joe had taken when he first crossed the river till they began to see the outlines of buildings in front of them.

During the march Joe rode with the young officer, and was giving him points on Indian warfare, which Mr. Brown eagerly took in, for he was by no means the conceited upstart that Jack Corbett had imagined him. He came from an interior town of Indiana, and had never seen a wild Indian in his life till he came to the frontier with his regiment; but he was no worse off than many volunteers in other fields, who had never seen a soldier till they found themselves confronted with war in its sternest aspects.

Joe, who had a good deal of knowledge of human nature, knew that he and his men were of the very stuff that makes good soldiers when it is trained; and he rode on with young Brown, resolved that he would help him all he could, for on him and his men, green as they were, rested his hopes of saving the fugitives that he had left in the bad lands.

CHAPTER V.

CROSSING THE RIVER.

THE Sioux scouts at the Missouri river were scattered along in bands, watching the further bank that night, near morning, when they saw moving figures and recognized the well-known outline of a strong column of horsemen coming down to the river-side.

All was activity at once; but no noise was made as the Indian galloped up and down, getting their scattered men together, and preparing to resist the crossing.

They could hear the rumbling of wheels in the fog that hung over the water, and saw the crowd of horses and men on the further bank getting darker and darker.

Then came a big black object, the like of which they had never seen before, till it was taken down to the water, and revealed itself in the form of a bateau, with a smaller boat in front, both being launched together from carriages.

Then the Indians realized that their foes were coming on in earnest, and they sent off to the rear to hurry up every available man to make an attack, when the boats should reach the shore.

They kept behind the shelter of the trees that grew on the side of the river, and kept an anxious watch on the movements of the bateau and its attendant boat.

The latter was rapidly pulled across the river, and made a reconnaissance.

Before the rowers could pull it out of danger, a volley was poured into it from the bank, that caused one of the men to drop his oar with a cry of pain, and the boat was pulled rapidly away again, amid the triumphant yells of the Indians, who thought that they had repulsed the attack for good.

They were disappointed, when another and another boat put out from the further shore, and two more bateaux made their appearance, and were launched in the stream, while a warm fire was opened from the small boats that kept in the advance.

Some of these small crafts went down the river, and others went up its course, so that the Indians began to get confused at the number of their opponents.

Then one of the big bateaux was swept out into the stream, with a number of the smaller boats, and pulled straight across the river, crowded with men, who opened a hot fire on the fringe of trees that covered the Indians.

The fire was returned, but in a slow and scattering fashion; for the Sioux saw that their enemies outnumbered them, three or four to one, and that the resistance could not be much further prolonged.

When the bateau at last reached the shore, and a crowd of men began to rush up the bank, firing as they went, the Indians, not accustomed to such close work, went off at a gallop, and the bank of the river was soon occupied by a whole regiment of new troops, who had seen, under the guidance of the cautious old Indian-fighter, who was in chief command there, their first battle, and were flushed with the easy success.

The old general did not attempt to pursue his advantage by going any further, though the Indians expected it, and were circling in the prairie outside, hoping that the green soldiers, whom they had learned to despise, would come after them, and give them a chance to retaliate, in their own style of warfare.

* A prairie nickname for General S.

But the leader of the whites had no such intention. He had crossed the river, establishing himself on the further bank, and that was enough for him, till he had brought up his trains, and was ready for an advance. The rest of the night was passed in getting from the fort all the rest of the bateaux, and ferrying the cavalry and infantry over the stream in full force.

When the morning dawned, there were four thousand men, of whom one thousand were horsemen, across the river.

California Joe, who had watched the whole proceeding with undisguised approval, exclaimed to his partner, as they sat on the grass by the grazing ponies:

"The old man's head's level, arter all, Jack, I'd like to see the Sioux stand the racket, when the hull of this outfit gits at 'em."

As the sun rose, the old general came riding to the front, or rather driving in an ambulance, his white hair conspicuous on the front seat, beside the driver; and, as he passed the scouts, he said to California Joe, with a smile:

"Now, then, boys, you've routed me out, and the rest is your lookout. Where are these fugitives you want us to rescue?"

Joe answered the smile with another, as he said: "Reckon we'll do it, gin'ral. Ef you'll let me take the *calv'ry*, we'll go ahead, till we find 'em. They oughter be in the bad lands, a matter of twenty mile from hyar; and me and Jack we kin lead the boys to the place, as easy as slidin' off a log."

But the old general did not seem to relish the idea of letting the scout take the volunteer cavalry, of which he entertained a great distrust, on account of the difference between it and the regulars to whom he was accustomed.

"We'll go forward, in proper style, or not at all," he answered. "All I want of you and your partner is to be guides, and show us where the fugitives are hidden."

Joe pointed off to the southwest.

"Ef they be alive, gin'ral, they must be thar, in the bad lands. But ef we got to wait fur the trampers we can't git thar in time, I'm afeard. The hosses will hev to stir right smart to do it afore sundown."

The only reply of the general was to give an order to his chief of staff, and the whole force set out over the prairie, with a long skirmish line of infantry in front, the cavalry in the rear of the center moving slowly.

The effect of the advance was imposing, but the scout, as he saw it, muttered to his friend:

"I knowed it; I knowed it. Old Steady-go-easy won't never ketch an Injun as long as he rides in that dorg-goned ambulance. I'm afeard that Lootenant Vance's goose air cooked, ef he don't hev better luck than common. We'll find his bones, and that's all we'll find, when we git to the bad lands."

But he knew too well the inutility of arguing with a regular officer to attempt the task, and the little army proceeded on its way for another hour, the prairie ahead of them dotted with small parties of Indians, hovering in front and on either flank, none of them daring to come within gunshot, but all the while getting thicker and thicker, while the smoke signals from Indian fires were visible round the horizon, showing that the alarm was spreading.

The old general kept on his course at the same leisurely pace till the sun had reached the zenith, when he ordered a halt; and the infantry soldiers of the command began to hunt for buffalo-chips to make fires and cook coffee.

Then Joe's anger blazed out, as he saw the deliberate way in which the general was acting, and he rode up to him.

The veteran had got out of his ambulance, and was sweeping the horizon with a telescope, when the scout approached him and asked:

"Please, gin'ral, kin I say a word?"

The general nodded.

"Waal, then, gin'ral," the scout began, "ef we air gwine to resky Lootenant Vance, this ain't the way to do it."

The general favored him with a haughty stare. "Indeed? And what business is it of yours, I should like to know? You scouts have your privileges; but you must not abuse them."

"I know that, gin'ral," Joe answered; "but when a good man like Lootenant Vance is in danger, it's time to speak out. Gin'ral, won't ye let me take the *calv'ry* and make a dash? Look at them galoos! Th'a'r' jest larfin' at us! See 'em at thar games! Give me only a hunderd men, and we kin git help to the lootenant. It don't need all this outfit to drive a few Injuns. Thar ain't more'n three hunderd of 'em, all told."

The general cast a glance in the direction in-

dicated by the scout, and saw that a cloud of Indians, numbering about three hundred men, as Joe had said, was coming down toward the camp, the ponies going at full speed, the riders circling to and fro, while their yells were already audible, and the men in the camp had begun to fidget and stare at the enemy, as if a little more would lead them into a stampede.

The men with them were all green, and the sight of the Indians, coming on so recklessly, had already excited in them, full as they were of the wonderful prowess of the savages, suspicions that the Indians actually meant to attack them.

The general knew better, but he was far from being easy in his mind as to the horses of the cavalry. He knew that the awkward riders were easily demoralized, and feared that a stampede of the animals might take place.

He turned to Joe at once:

"Take the rest of the scouts and drive those scoundrels off."

Joe grinned.

"Thar ain't but twenty or thirty of us, anyhaow, gin'ral, and while we was drivin' them, they mou't take a dash at the stock. Ain't it safer to git the men on thar critters?"

The general hesitated, and while he was looking at the Indians, who continued their apparently reckless advance, there was a motion among the herd of horses that threatened a stampede, when his indecision vanished, and he said to Captain Colville, who was close to him, watching the affair anxiously:

"Tell the men to mount. We can't be defied in this way. They might as well begin now as any time."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST FIGHT.

JOE could hardly resist a whoop of triumph, as he ran to his horse and mounted.

The next moment, the loud blare of the cavalry bugles rung through the camp, sounding "to horse," and the men went to the stakes where their beasts were tied, and thereby saved them from the stampede which the Indians had planned. For a few moments there was a great confusion, the Indians coming up boldly, almost within pistol-shot; but when the infantry soldiers ran hastily out into a skirmish line, to defend the camp, and began to fire, with their long Enfield rifles, the tables were turned in a hurry, and the dash became a hasty flight on the part of the savages, leaving several men on the ground.

True, they returned, with the disregard of danger that characterizes their race on such occasions to save the bodies from mutilation; but by the time the cavalymen had mounted, and were stationed in line, ready to advance, not an Indian was visible, though every one knew that they had but retreated behind the swells of the prairie, and were watching the camp, as keenly as ever.

But the defiance had roused the blood of the old general at last, and when Captain Colville came to him and asked in his most coaxing tone:

"General, won't you let me give those brutes one charge?" he actually nodded.

"But don't go too far," he said, with all his old caution. "There is no danger so great as scattering in front of those devils, and the men are not soldiers yet, remember."

"I'll be very careful, sir," was the reply.

Then Colville gave the signal, and two green regiments of cavalry, that had never yet been in action, advanced at a walk, in line of battle, across the prairie, amid the shouts of the infantrymen, who were exulting over the way in which they had driven back the Indians, and wanted to see what the cavalry would do.

At that early date in the war there was a great deal of jealousy between the two arms of the service; and the cavalymen were often unduly nervous, from having suffered so much ridicule.

Colville, who was a devout believer in the efficacy of the saber and a charge, noticed that there was a tremulous movement in the line as it advanced, and he rode out in front of the regiments to encourage the men.

He knew that officers and men alike were quite ignorant of their duties beyond riding, while he was the only officer present who, having been in the old regular army, had seen service against Indians.

California Joe and his fellow scouts had ridden ahead in an irregular line at a sharp trot, and had already begun to fire at the Indians as they became revealed by the advance.

The captain, though there were two colonels present, was given the command, by tacit admission that he knew most about the matter,

and he halted his line as soon as the scouts were fairly engaged, to give the men a speech.

He had found out how efficacious speeches are to stir the blood of volunteers, and he had learned how to manage them in the long stay at Fort Blake.

"Look here, boys," he shouted, as the long line came to a halt. "We are going into our first fight, and I want you all to remember one thing. Keep your ranks and obey orders. If you see the Indians running, don't you run after them. The scouts know them better than you do. Keep together and give them the point, if they stand the charge. Now, forward, march! Trot, march!"

Then the whole long line swept forward at a trot; and, as the nervous volunteers rose over the crest of the next swell, they saw the Indians going off at full speed in a cloud of dust, at which sight the recruits raised a wild yell of triumph, and began to gallop, just as the captain had foreseen they would, all their fear of Indians gone in a minute at the sight of the flying foe.

California Joe and his friends were galloping after the Indians, firing as they went, and it was hard work to restrain the excited volunteers from breaking ranks and rushing off all over the prairie.

Colville was compelled to order a halt, and reform his advance at a walk, before the men calmed down, and then they were further quieted by observing that the Indians had turned on the handful of scouts, and were chasing them back to the shelter of the line, as hard as they had been galloping in the advance.

California Joe came back laughing, and as soon as he got near to Colville, he shouted:

"Bully fun, Cap, ain't it? We'll have a fight yet, I do b'lieve. The varmints air tryin' to git us on thar resarves."

"Go ahead, then, and do your own duty," said the captain, sharply. "I am going to advance as far as they will let us."

Joe gave another whoop and turned his horse, yelling as he shot ahead:

"Now, boys, root hog or die!"

Then away dashed the reckless scouts, and the long line of cavalry resumed its stately advance, though, if Colville had looked back, he would have seen that his general was making frantic gesticulations to him to return, to all of which the staff officer was blind, knowing that if he heeded them, the whole force would be likely to stop where it was.

And Colville, being only a captain in his own regiment, who had seen most of his brother officers made into generals and colonels, by the rapid promotion that accompanied the beginning of the Civil War, was determined to do what he could in the restricted field in which he found himself to deserve promotion.

So he continued his course, the two volunteer colonels being under his orders for the time, and trusting to him implicitly; for they had not yet acquired the jealousy of regulars, which was a feature of the later war.

The long line advanced at a trot as before; and, when they topped the next swell, Colville looked back, and saw that the general had put his whole force in motion, and was coming on, skirmish line in front, as if he was about to face the whole confederacy of the tribes on the plains, instead of a few hundred Sioux.

The officer who was taking the cavalry forward with such boldness, grinned to himself, as he looked back at the toiling column.

"I guess the old man will wonder more before he has got through with me," he muttered. "I'll lead him a dance. Old Steady-go-easy isn't going to have *everything* to please himself this campaign."

He had served long enough with the cautious old general to know that if he once went back where he could be reached by orders, there was no further hope for any fighting, and he therefore kept on, without noticing the advance of the column behind him, though he could see that the general was sending a young officer of his staff after him to recall him.

Like the celebrated Lord Nelson in a similar case, Colville preferred to be as blind as a bat, and rode on with his line of cavalry, so fast that the young officer who had been sent after him was forced to full speed to overtake him, which he did not do till both were out of sight of General S., in the rear.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FUGITIVES.

WHILE Joe and his friends were making their way to the fort, the little party, left in the bad lands behind them, was every moment in more imminent danger.

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They had been hidden away in the bottom of a ravine, in the hope that no Indians might see them, but the straying of a herd of buffalo that way had drawn near them the very foes from whom they were hiding; though as yet they knew it not.

They were a forlorn-looking party, and but little calculated to take care of themselves in the midst of Indians. There was old Colonel Vance, once of North Carolina, but an emigrant to Arkansas, whence he had fled to save his life, broken-hearted, after the passage of the ordinance of secession. He had with him his wife, old and feeble, like himself; his niece, Mabel Fay, who was also his adopted daughter; and these three helpless ones had, to defend them, only two able-bodied men.

One of these was the colonel's son, an officer of the regular army, who had been caught in the general surrender of troops, by Twiggs, in the State of Texas; and had been held as a prisoner ever since, having refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Southern Confederacy. He had been allowed, as a special favor, to go to his father's plantation, and had managed the escape, which had been effected with the aid of Honest Tom Biggs, a tall, raw-boned mountaineer from North Carolina, who believed in the Vance family as the greatest in the world, and had followed his old employer, through all his misfortunes, with a fidelity common among the despised white "crackers" of the South.

They all wore "homespun" suits, and carried the universal shotgun of the south, instead of rifles, though they had revolvers.

They did not dare to stir from the place where the scouts had left them, and the women cowered together, listening to the distant thunder of the great herd of buffaloes, as it passed through the ravines.

Biggs, whose temperament was melancholy, observed, as he listened to the sounds:

"I'm afeard we'll never git aout of this, lootenant. I am that, indeed."

George Vance glanced at the women, as he tried to cheer them up by saying:

"Yes, we shall. As soon as it gets dark, we will try to strike for the fort. Hark, what is that? By heavens it sounds like—"

It was a faint, distant yell, which young Vance recognized as coming from the throat of an Indian, and he looked round at his father.

The old man was seated by the pack of one of the mules, with his head resting on his hands, and as the yell penetrated into the ravine, he started slightly, and lifted his head.

"What's that?" he asked, quickly. "It sounds like the howl of the savages, that we fought in the Black Hawk war. George, have they called in the Indians to their help, indeed?"

George saw that his father's mind, almost entirely broken down by grief, was running on the past, and he said soothingly:

"There are Indians around us, father; but we have a good position, and we can beat them off, if they attack us. Don't worry; but attend to mother. See, she is frightened."

Again the wild yell burst on their ears, this time much nearer, and Biggs exclaimed:

"The varmints hev faound us. Haow in blazes c'u'd they hev done it?"

"They hev followed our trail," responded George, calmly; but they can only come on us on one side, and we can hold them here. Get your gun ready, and we will give them a dose, as they come round the shoulder of the bank yonder."

He had not thought of his father, as being of any more use in such a battle than one of the women; but, to his surprise, the old man came up to him, carrying his old double-barreled gun, and said in his feeble voice:

"George, lad, I can shoot yet; and if it has come to a fight, and they have brought the savages against us, they shall see that old Vance has not forgotten how to fire a gun."

"Go back, father. Think if you should be hit, what trouble it would make," protested George, anxiously. "We two are sufficient to guard this opening. You take care of mother and Mabel."

But at this minute, another wild yell, much closer to them, startled them all, and produced on the old man the effect of waking him out of his apathy altogether.

His blue eyes flashed, and he cried:

"Not a bit of it, boy. I followed Scott at Lundy's Lane; I fought in the Black Hawk War; and if there is fighting, I'm not too old to fire a shot yet."

So saying, he took his place behind a low ridge of clay, that formed a sort of natural breastwork round the place, and began to get his piece into order for rapid firing.

George Vance had no option but to give in to the old man; for, at that very moment, a third yell came appallingly near to them, and the young officer cast an apprehensive glance back at his mother and Mabel, who were cowering together in each other's arms.

California Joe had warned him that if the Indians saw women with them they would be so much the more eager and determined, and he called out:

"Mabel, bring mother, and come under the shelter of this bank. *The Indians must not see you.*"

The girl heard and understood him, and whispered to her aunt, who followed the injunction with a ready docility that showed how terrified she was.

Both women cowered down close to the men; and Biggs, who was watching the front, called out in a low, warning tone:

"Hyar they come!"

"Lie low," ordered George, suiting the action to the word, under the shelter of the clay bank, where he had made several holes to enable him to level his gun with the least exposure of his person.

The next moment the feathered head-dress of a warrior came round the edge of the ravine, and a tall Indian made his appearance with his rifle before him, peered cautiously at the breastwork, and came forward as if to explore.

Biggs was about to fire, but George checked him with a low caution, and the mountaineer let the Indian come on, both men lying hidden by the breastwork.

Presently the forms of three more Indians came into sight, and then a whole string of wild-looking savages advanced slowly toward the low bank, at a distance of about a hundred yards, all having their rifles held before them ready to fire a volley at anything that might raise its head.

But George had no such intention when he could fire through a loop-hole, and he had constructed more than one such in the clay of the bank.

To be sure, a bullet would have gone through the bank immediately around them; but as long as the assailants did not know where they were, the disguise was sufficient for safety.

Old Vance seemed to be the coolest of the party, now that he was waked up, and whispered:

"Don't fire too soon, boys. It's all in the first volley, with these fellows."

The old man seemed to be carried away with the memories of the past, and was muttering to himself, as he peered through the opening at the advancing Indians.

At last they had got to within about fifty yards, and George knew they could not much longer be deceived by the apparent silence of the breastwork.

The passage had widened, they had got into a squad in front, huddled into a group, when George nodded to Biggs, and both fired their shotguns, loaded with buckshot, at that short range, into the very midst of the Indians, the old man following suit a little after them.

The volley threw the Indians into instant confusion, and a second volley was sent after the first, from the second barrels of the guns.

The buckshot, spreading at the distance best for their execution, made fearful havoc among the savages, and, though they fired a hasty and harmless volley at the breastwork, the bullets hurt no one, and the remnant of the savages fled in dismay, leaving their dead and wounded, to the number of five, behind them.

George Vance had been surprised at seeing them on foot, for he knew that the prairie Indians, as a rule, never dismount when they can avoid it, but he knew also their indisposition to abandon dead bodies to the enemy, and he cried to Biggs, who was rising excitedly to climb over the breastwork:

"Load up again, man! If you go there, you'll get killed, sure."

And, as if to confirm his prediction, one of the fallen Indians, a man shot through the breast, and wounded in a way that would have utterly disabled a white man, here turned over on his elbow, and sent a shot from the rifle that he had not yet discharged, which came near to ending the mortal career of the mountaineer.

It knocked his hat off, and sent Biggs back to his place in a hurry; while old Vance, who seemed as cool as a cucumber, now that the fighting had begun, remarked, in his high, piping tones:

"Yes, yes, Tom, don't be rash. I've fought Indians before, and they are never so dangerous as when they are desperately wounded. They

are wild beasts, my boy. Don't give them a chance."

All the while he was speaking, he was reloading his gun, pouring in the powder from a flask, and putting a handful of buckshot on top of the charge, with perfect precision, muttering to himself, all the time.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUCK AND BALL.

THE reloading of the guns did not take long; and then George Vance looked over the breastwork, and saw two of the Indians, he had thought killed, crawling away.

They seemed to be desperately hurt, for their progress was slow; but they were getting out of range; and Tom Biggs, who was nothing, if not revengeful, said savagely:

"Let's exterminate the darned brutes."

And he was raising his gun to execute his threat, when George stopped him, with the remark:

"No use to throw away ammunition. They won't give us any more trouble, if we let them alone, and we shall want all the shots we have. In a few minutes more, the rest of them will be round the corner, trying to recover those bodies."

"They'll hev a fine time," remarked Biggs, grinning, as he reluctantly lowered his piece; but he obeyed the order he had received, and let the Indians crawl round the corner.

They were received with a shrill yell that showed how near their friends were, and Tom Biggs remarked, as he heard it:

"Jest as well I didn't fire, lootenant. They're a-waitin' fur us."

"The next time, they will come on horse-back," Vance observed, as he listened to the yell. "I don't see why they didn't come that way, before."

His prediction was verified in a very short time, when they heard another yell, and round the edge of the bank came, riding at full speed, a dozen Indians, as if they intended to charge the breastwork and capture it by a rush.

The elder Vance shouted excitedly:

"Don't fire too quick, boys. I've been among them before. Let them come close, and give it to them, as hard as you can."

Tom Biggs turned pale as he looked at the rush of excited savages, but he held his gun firmly, and it was well he did so.

Instead of charging up to the breastwork, the Indians only swooped down on the dead bodies, and, as they came to them, stooped from their saddles, and caught up the foremost by an arm and a leg, swinging it up on their horses' necks and wheeling to flee.

Then came a shot from old Vance, which brought one of the rescuers from his saddle, all riddled with buckshot, and the body fell to the ground, for the second man was wounded by the scattering of the shot.

George Vance fired, and threw another of the rescuers from his saddle, when the rest fled, with a wild, wailing cry, as if they recognized the impossibility of forcing the passage, in the face of such odds. As they went round the corner, Biggs sent another shower of lead after them, and had the satisfaction of seeing another man drop from his saddle, when he cried aloud in his glee:

"Oh, lootenant, don't I wish that 'ere Tennessee was hyar naow."

He referred to California Joe, of whom he was very jealous, principally because he came from the State of Tennessee—which Biggs, as a good "Tar Heel," hated cordially—and partly because Joe, who believed in rifles for the prairies, had made derogatory remarks concerning the shotguns of the refugees.

"Why?" asked George, as he rammed down another charge.

"The darned ornary galoot said that shotguns warn't no use," said Biggs, with intense scorn. "I'd like to ax him ef he thinks his darned old rifle could hev done any better'n these things. Hey, lootenant?"

And Vance was fain to admit that, for the work in which they had been just engaged, the shotgun, with its heavy charge of buckshot, was a weapon infinitely superior to a rifle.

"California Joe was right about one thing," he answered, to keep the mountaineer from getting too conceited over his victory. "If we were out on the open plains, and the Indians had rifles, they could pick us off at a distance, and we could not hit them at all."

Biggs seemed to be struck by the remark.

"D'ye think that, reely, lootenant?"

"Of course I do. These guns are only good to a hundred yards, and the rifle is good at three."

Biggs cast a regretful glance at the dead bodies

of the Indians, lying in the pass in front of them.

"And thar's two of the galoots n' rifles, naow; and we oughter hev 'em: oughtn't we?" George Vance nodded.

"We should be better off with them; but I don't see any way to get them," he said.

In a moment, Biggs had jumped over the low breastwork, and was running toward the bodies, with his gun raised to shoot, if any of them gave signs of life.

But they were all dead, to the number of four; and he got to them, and deliberately stripped them of all their arms and accouterments, with no molestation from their friends outside, who could not see him. He took good care to do his work so quietly that he was not heard.

When he got back to the breastwork, he laughed triumphantly.

"We don't know nothen' about Injuns; we don't; oh, no, not at all! I only wish that Tennessee galoot was hyar naow. I'd make him own up that No' Cal'ny kin fight like a streak, when she gits waked up."

And Vance had to admit that the mountaineer had acted well, in the whole of the fight.

After Tom Biggs had come back, and the rifles and ammunition had been distributed, there was a long silence, the defenders of the place expecting every moment to meet a fresh assault, for they could hardly believe that the Indians, after such loss as they had suffered, would be willing to give up the battle, without one more effort for revenge.

But, as the hours passed on, they became convinced that the punishment inflicted had cowed the men in their front, to such an extent that they did not dare to renew their efforts; and when the sun at last set, and darkness spread over the prairie outside, making the shadows of the ravines more somber than ever, old Vance said to his son:

"If they are the same as the Indians in the Black Hawk War, George, they won't attack us in the dark, and we can sleep safely. I've heard Indians say that, if a man is killed in the dark, he will be on the night-side of the happy hunting grounds for all eternity, and I know that we never found them daring a night attack on us, unless it was just before the dawn of day."

George agreed with his father, for he had heard the same things from old regulars, when he had been stationed in the plains of Texas; and, as he realized that they were likely to have a quiet night, he drew a long breath of relief.

The little party of fugitives, therefore, made themselves as comfortable as they could, and, in spite of their earnest desire to watch, first one, then the other, dropped asleep, so that the Indians, had they been aware of it, might have been sorely tempted to try the efficacy of a night attack, in the teeth of all their traditions.

But George, though he dozed a little in the earlier part of the night, from weariness, was too much of a soldier, and too anxious for the safety of his party, to rest easy till daylight.

He knew that their rescue would depend on the success of California Joe in his mission after the troops; and that the utmost he and his party could hope for, was to hold out in the strong position they had been left in, till the expected succor arrived.

Watching the stars, with the eye of a man who had studied his astronomy at West Point, and had not forgotten it altogether, he saw that the dawn could not be more than an hour or so in coming, and that he must be at work.

He knew there must be an opening at the other end of the bad lands, through which the buffalo, whose coming had been the cause of their discovery, must have made their exit. To find this exit, and, if there were no Indians guarding it, to make a possible escape therefrom, or at least to get a chance to graze the mules, for a little while before daylight, was his object as he stole along.

It was nervous work in the dark, for he did not know at what instant he might stumble on an Indian in hiding, but he kept on his course, following the rise of the ground in the dark, almost as well as he could have done in the daylight, and had traversed several hundred yards, when he was startled by the sound of a light and stealthy footstep behind him.

To throw himself flat down on his face, and bring his gun forward, was the most natural impulse of his training, and he listened to the light footfall with a beating heart, thinking surely that some Indian had got between him and his party in spite of the dark.

On came the footstep, and presently he saw a dark figure moving cautiously along up the ravine in which he was lying.

He could not distinguish the outline in the

dark, but there was a rustling that sounded to him like the trailing of an Indian blanket on the ground.

On came the figure and, had almost got him, when he cocked his gun and said in a low tone:

"Halt!"

Then the figure started violently, and a sweet voice that he recognized as that of his cousin, Mabel Fay, said with a tremor that showed how frightened she had been:

"Oh, George, is that you?"

George rose to his feet astonished.

"Great heavens, Mabel," he said, "what made you come out here? You mad girl, go back at once! This is no place for you."

But the girl, with a little nervous laugh, brought down the butt of a rifle on the ground, saying earnestly and rapidly:

"I won't do it, sir. I can fire a rifle as well as any of you. I cannot sit quiet and see you all in danger, when one idle hand might be made useful. George, you must let me come with you."

"But, Mabel," he said in a vexed tone, "this is folly. What do you mean by being able to fire a rifle? You are a girl."

"But for all that, when you were at West Point I learned to shoot, down at the old plantation," she retorted. "Tom Biggs taught me, and I can hit a bull's-eye, as well as any of you, if the distance is not too great. George, I know you are going into danger. Let me share it for this once, and if I do not behave well, I will never ask you again."

He saw that it was no use to dispute with her, and reluctantly acquiesced, with the remark:

"If you must go, you must; but you must promise to keep behind me, and do what I tell you."

"I'll promise that," she said, eagerly.

Then they stole forward, and as they advanced, the gray light of the dawn began to steal into the recesses of the bad lands, revealing the tall, yellow clay banks round them, till at last they saw the open sky, with the morning star in a blaze of pale luster, right over the opening, and George said, decidedly:

"Now you must go back, and tell Tom Biggs to keep good guard. If there is any trouble this morning it will come just at this time; but the two guns at the other side are enough to keep the narrow passage. I am going up to see if there are any Indians here."

"And won't you let me stay and see if there are any?" she asked him, pleadingly. "I promise to go back as soon as you tell me, George."

"Well, then, come on with me, and we will see what there is here," he said.

With that he stole forward again, and put his head cautiously out over the edge of the ravine, so as to command a view of the prairie.

He had no sooner done so, than he withdrew it, and said to Mabel:

"Go back. There are Indians around, just as I thought, and they are coming here to catch us at dawn. Tell Tom Biggs that when he hears firing from this side, he is to bring all the animals here, and the rest of the party. We are safer here than there, for there is no room for the Indians to get at us on either side."

She hesitated; but he warned her off with an imperative gesture.

"I tell you it must be done, Mabel. If you refuse, we may none of us live to see the fort."

That decided her, and she turned her back on him, and hastened away, while the young officer prepared to keep the narrow entrance, at which he found himself.

He had distinguished, in the faint light of the coming dawn, a number of Indians, who were riding slowly toward the opening, coming from several quarters at once, while their fires dotted the prairie at considerable distances round, and from more than one smoke-signals were rising in puffs through the clear air.

His suspicions were correct, and he had before him the probability of a siege on both sides, with an issue that no man could foretell.

The strongest point of the situation was that he had come to a narrow place, where the passage of the ravine wound to and fro, and where two men could easily defend their front from any number of foes, if they kept under the shelter of the banks, and did not expose their heads on the prairie above.

He waited there, in great anxiety, for near half an hour, watching the slow coming of the Indians when he was surprised to see the greater part of them were diverging to the other end of the bad lands. This showed him the object of the Indians, and where their real attack would come.

As the sun rose, and shed a flood of glory over the level plain above, the sight became wonder-

fully picturesque, as the long lines of Indians swept by.

The stronger light also revealed to him the mistakes into which he had been led in the dim illumination of the early dawn, for he saw that the great body of Indians was at least three miles off, while those coming to his own attack could not number more than thirty or forty.

But, as the sun rose, he saw that the attack was to begin in earnest; for, the moment the light struck the plain, the nearest Indians whipped up their horses, and came down at a rush toward the place, where he lay concealed.

A short time brought them within gunshot, and they galloped past the end of the ravine, at full speed, hiding behind their horses, with the caution of their race, though they did not yet seem to know whether the place was tenanted.

The foremost of the line passed within fifty feet of where he lay, when he showed himself.

He was rewarded with a loud yell and the discharge of a number of arrows, that came whizzing round him, one of them striking his arm, but only sticking in his sleeve.

He was sorely tempted to fire; but remembered enough of the effect of the volley of buckshot, that had produced such effect at the other side of the bad lands, to keep him from being in too much of a hurry.

CHAPTER IX.

HUNTED DOWN.

THE Indians, according to their habit, passed before the mouth of the ravine, the first time, without attempting to charge home. They were merely reconnoitering the ground.

The second time, they swept by so close, that Vance could not resist the opportunity, and he leaped up with a shout, waving his arms, so as to cause the first pony in the line to swerve.

In so doing, it exposed the side of its rider, and Vance fired.

The shot went home, and not only brought down the pony, but its rider too; while the scattered buckshot wounded the next pony in the line, so that it went lame at once, shot in the hind leg.

The rest of the Indians, thinking the gun empty, rose in their saddles and came down with a great rush, when George fired the remaining barrel into the midst of the huddled bodies, at a distance of twenty-five yards, with such effect that the charge was broken, and the men fled in a disorderly mob.

Knowing that they were sure to return for their dead, he began to reload at once, and in so doing, turned his head slightly, to glance behind him.

The sight he saw almost made him throw down his gun and flee.

There, coming at full speed round the edge of the bad lands, was a troop of white men, in the well-known Confederate gray.

One glance at the odds against him showed him that his time had come.

He might beat off Indians from the fear of slaughter, but those men never.

He would have to die at his post, and the sacrifice bid fair to be useless.

Thinking over all these things, he was still loading his gun as fast as he could, watching keenly the Indians in front of him, to see if they were in collusion with the new-comers.

The sight of the gray-coats, at such a time, and in such a place, astounded him; but he could not but fear it boded him ill.

As he looked, the party of white men, which numbered some thirty or forty, galloped round the edge of the bad lands, and came tearing down toward him, till within a hundred yards or so.

The white men paid no attention to the Indians, who, on their part, seemed to be satisfied that the new-comers were not enemies.

Then Vance heard the loud command in English: "Halt!" and the party drew up their horses, while the leader pulled out of his pocket a handkerchief that had once been white and waved it in the air, shouting:

"Hilloa, Yank! I want to talk."

"Keep your distance then," cried back George in his most menacing tones. "The man that comes within shot of me, is going to get killed."

The stranger laughed aloud as he heard the threat and shouted in reply:

"Keep yer old pop-gun for those who are afraid of it. I'm not. The first shot you send, will be the signal for my men to fire. They're no Indians, but white men all, and the best thing you can do, if you want to be treated as a white man, is to surrender."

"Surrender, and be scalped and tortured to death, you mean? The best thing we can do is

to die fighting. The troops that are coming will avenge our death."

It was a bold defiance to hurl at such a force; but George knew that, the longer he talked, the longer would be his respite.

The other had been listening to him attentively, and here he burst in:

"I've heard your voice before. Who be you?"

George, startled by the words, looked more attentively at the other, who was in plain sight, and recognized in him one of the officers of the rebel guard, put over him before he was sent to his father's plantation.

The sight did not reassure him, for he knew that, if he was caught by any of his white enemies, his escape would be liable to be interpreted as a breach of his parole, though, as a matter of fact, he had given none, and had been allowed to go to the plantation, in the hope that the example of his friends and neighbors would be efficacious in making a good Confederate of him.

"It makes no matter what I am," he said. "All we ask here is to be let alone, to get to Fort Blake. We have women in our party, and, if you have the spirit of a white man, you will make these savages draw off their forces, and let us go. You don't make war on women, do you?"

The rebel shook his head, and his face assumed a graver cast, as he replied:

"No, we don't; but thar's only one way we kin save ye from the Injuns. If you'll surrender to me, you have the word of Frank Rhett, of the State of Texas, that the ladies sha'n't be hurt. But ye must do it at once, or 'twill be too late."

George made his decision in a moment. The white men might be severe with him; but they would not insult ladies, and anything was better than falling into the hands of the Indians.

"If you will send away those Indians with you and come down here to help us white men defend ourselves from those at the other side," he called out, "I will surrender to you; but if you deceive us, and give us into the power of the Indians—"

"Hold on, hold on!" interrupted Rhett eagerly. "I hail from Texas, and we air all white men thar, stranger. We was sent up hyar to look fur a darnation scalawag that run from us, and ef we find him, 'twill go hard with him; but as fur lettin' ladies be hurt by Injuns, we ain't the men to stand by and see that did. As fur as that goes, I'll take the ladies into the Yankee lines, ef nothen' else will do."

"Do you give me the word of a Southern gentleman that you will take them to the Federal lines if I surrender?" asked George, as eagerly as the other had spoken.

Rhett nodded.

"Stranger, whoever ye air, I give my word," he said, and George at once answered:

"Then I surrender."

He watched keenly, in spite of his words, to see if any sign of treachery was manifest; but the Texan did not even call up his men to his help. He advanced alone toward the defender of the ravine, and when he was near him, said, with a keen scrutiny that embarrassed George:

"I know I've see'd your face somewhere. Who be you, anyway?"

"I am Lieutenant Vance, of the United States cavalry," was the reply, at which the Texan's face changed to an expression of great gravity, as he ejaculated earnestly:

"Lootenant Vance, on my soul, I'm sorry fur ye. I didn't think ye was as much of a man as ye air. You're the man I was sent arter to ketch, and by gum, ef I'd known as much as I do now, I believe I'd not have undertook the job."

Then he turned round to his men and called out sternly:

"Send them infernal Injuns packin'. We air sogers of the Confed'rit States, and we don't want no savages to help us. Let Injun Charley tell 'em. He understands tha'r lingo."

He stood by Vance, as if he had no apprehensions of treachery from the man who had just surrendered to him, and did not even offer to take his arms from him.

Then one of the men who had come with him said something to the Indians in their own tongue, and they went off reluctantly, the white soldiers coming toward the mouth of the ravine as the last of the savages rode off.

Not till they were all there did Rhett speak to Vance, and then it was to say:

"Now, lootenant, ef you're ready, we'll go and see the ladies. You air my prisoner, but I don't want'er be oncivil, all the same. I've my orders, and they've got to be obeyed; but, all the same, we ain't hogs in Texas."

Vance bowed coldly, and the party went down in the maze of ravines, leaving three sentries at the place where they had entered, with the order from Rhett:

"Don't let a Injun come nigh ye. Shoot, ef ye must, but talk 'em civil fu'st. Now, lootenant."

Vance led the way, and the men in gray followed him till they came to the place where the little knot of fugitives was huddled behind the breastworks, in the center of the bad lands, watching for the Indians at the other side.

Then Rhett said to George Vance, in a low tone:

"If I let you keep your arms, will you give your parole not to escape?"

George shook his head.

"I shall try to escape whenever I can. You have followed me all this way for no other purpose than to take me back, and my commission as an officer of the United States compels me to go to my own lines as soon as I can do so."

Rhett shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please, lootenant. Thar ain't no more chance of your escapin' than thar is of findin' a cat with two tails. Give up yer weepins, then, and tell yer friends over yonder that ef they want no muss, the sooner they foller your example the healthier it'll be fur them."

Old Vance, Mabel and George's mother were already uneasily staring at the well-known gray coats, and their apprehensive looks showed that they feared the worst.

George called out to them:

"I have surrendered to this gentleman, who is a regular soldier, to save us all from the Indians. He has promised that the rest of you shall be taken into the Federal lines, and I am the only man who is a prisoner of war. The ladies will be safe."

They all seemed bewildered at what he said, and old Vance, with a heavy groan, faltered:

"And must we go back, too?"

CHAPTER X.

A GRAVE DILEMMA.

THE Texan who had command of the daring scouting-party that had penetrated so far into the plains, spite of Indians and Federal troops, was a handsome young fellow enough, with a reckless, devil-may-care expression that was a good index of his character.

He seemed to be kind-hearted, too; for he said, in answer to the old man's unconscious wail:

"You won't have to go back, jedge, at all. What the lootenant says is true. You kin all go into the Yankee lines, ef you wish, though sich warn't my orders, strictly speaking. But, when thar's ladies in the case, the gin'ral won't mind stretchin' things a little."

Mrs. Vance came forward here, and looked at him earnestly.

"Is not your name Rhett?" she asked him.

The young Texan seemed to be surprised by the question, for he regarded her with more attention than he had yet shown.

"Why, yes, madam," he said slowly. "That's the handle they give me; but you'll excuse me fur sayin' that I don't recognize you."

"But I ought to know you," said the old lady, still more earnestly. "Don't you remember that your mother had a friend named Mabel Poinsett, when they were girls together in Georgia? She married Colonel Vance, of North Carolina, and went to Arkansas."

"Yes, madam; I have often heard my mother speak of the lady, but I never saw her."

"But I saw you when you did not know it, and I shall never forget your face. You were the officer of the guard when my boy was kept a prisoner at Little Rock. Frank Rhett, in the name of your mother, my earliest friend, I ask you will you not let my boy go? Think, if your own mother was to ask me for such mercy to you, would not my boy grant it?"

The face of the young soldier was troubled for a moment, but he drew himself up, and replied:

"You will excuse me, madam, but you do not understand the duty of a soldier. I have to obey my orders, which were to bring back Lootenant Vance, dead or alive, wherever I found him. I had no orders to take the rest of you, and it is my duty to protect you from the Indians, though they are, as things stand now, our friends."

"Friends!" echoed Colonel Vance, bitterly. "It has come to a pretty pass, when high-minded Southern gentlemen are compelled to consort with the savages that have fought us for so

many years. Some things are being done now which make me ashamed of the very name of the South, and the fact that I was born there."

The Texan flushed hotly, as he answered:

"Everything is fair in war, sir, and I have no time to waste in talk. If you surrender, I will take you to the nearest fort, but your son (for I presume this gentleman is your son) must come with us as a prisoner. You may think yourself fortunate that you are not included in the same fate, as a scalawag, who had deserted his section, in the midst of a hostile invasion."

The old colonel threw down his gun with angry vehemence, as he said:

"Well, we surrender to force; but, mark my words, Mr. Rhett, you will all bitterly repent this, in less than two years from now."

Frank Rhett made a silent signal to one of his men to pick up the arms of the prisoners as they were surrendered, and retorted:

"That's as may be. In the mean time, the best thing you can all do is to keep a civil tongue in your heads. The Injuns won't take much talk from any one, I can tell you, and I shall have a hard time enough to protect you from them."

Then the business of disarming them was gone through with, and as soon as the whole party was surrounded by Rhett's soldiers, the leader went forward to the other end of the ravine, and beckoned to the Indians. George had dreaded this moment more than any other; for he knew the wild ferocity of the savages, and feared that the Texan would not be able to control them at all.

The first result of the signal made by the rebel officer to the outlying Indians was a yell of triumph, and, the next moment, they came running round the corner, waving their knives and tomahawks, some of them with their pistols out, and rushed forward to the prisoners, as if they meant to annihilate them.

George Vance sprung to the side of young Rhett, and pointed to the savages, crying:

"Your promise, sir! Those scoundrels must not be allowed to hurt the ladies."

The appeal had its effect on the Texan, for he at once drew a pistol and called to his men:

"Stop the varmints, boys! Not one of the women must be touched."

The rangers immediately drew up their rifles, and the man who had been called into service as interpreter, called out to the Indians in their own language, something which had the effect of stopping the rush and beginning an angry and excited discussion, which the prisoners could not understand.

There was a great deal of gesticulation and yelling; but the interpreter seemed to be holding fast to his position, and, by his gestures, made it plain that the white men had taken the prisoners and were bound to hold on to them for the present.

For a little while it seemed as if a collision was unavoidable between the excited Indians and the little band of resolute whites, but at last the clamor quieted down, and the interpreter explained to his commander the situation.

"Please, Cap," he said, "the Injuns is wild that they ain't goin' to hev no chance at the prisoners. They say as how, ef they hadn't corraled them, we wouldn't have got no chance at them, and that they oughter have the women folks, at least, fur thar share."

"Tell them they can't have the women at no price," said Rhett laconically. "That's talk."

The reply was translated, and George expected a great outbreak.

On the contrary, it was received in stony silence; but all the Indians began to go away, as if they had resolved to abandon their allies.

When all had departed but one, he came up to the interpreter and made him a short speech in his own language, after which he, too, departed. Then the interpreter translated the message.

"Please, Cap, the Injuns gives fa'r warnin' that we-uns and them air on the war-path, till this 'ere muss is settled."

"Why didn't you tell me before then?" asked the Texan angrily. "I might have taken one or two for bonds fur the rest. Injun Charley, you're the dorg-gorndest fool I ever met."

Injun Charley hung his head.

"I would ha' done it, Cap; but fur one thing. You don't know what it is to be took into an Injun tribe, as I hev be'n. I didn't dar' to speak, sir. Ef ever they'd ha' caught me arter that, death ain't no name fur what they'd ha' did to me. I hed my choice 'tween lettin' 'em go, or havin' 'em all daown on me, furever. And you know, Cap, whether we're gwine to hev an easy time, gittin' aout of this place, what with the Yanks and the reds."

His words seemed to strike the Texan, for he asked anxiously:

"Do you mean that the damned imps will try to keep us hyar?"

"That's jest what they said they was gwine to do, Cap. They say, ef you don't give 'em up the gals, they'll let the Yankee sogers come and take ye all. They say the Yanks ain't fur off, and that they ain't got no doubt that the Yankee gin'ral would give 'em all they wanted, ef he knowed who we was."

Rhett struck his forehead with an air of great vexation as he ejaculated:

"Great Heavens, why didn't I think of this? I wish we'd never taken up with the pesky brutes. I can't give up the ladies, and ef I don't this hyar party 'll be all took by the Yanks. Dorg-gorn the luck!"

Then he turned on Vance fiercely.

"What in thunder made you run away from us, when you was treated decent? Now see what a scrape you've got all your people into. You ought to be scalped; that's what's the matter with you, sir."

George made no answer, so as to avoid irritating the other any more than he could help.

Rhett turned on his heel and walked away, to hide his anger from the ladies, for he was a gentleman in that, as are all Southerners.

He was in a dilemma that promised to overturn all the success he had so far attained. He had accepted the mission to chase the fugitives, with the knowledge that it was a most hazardous one, unless he could catch them within the lines of his own army, in the state of Arkansas.

The temporary alliance with the Indians had been part of the Confederate policy in the Southwest, and Rhett had not hesitated to take advantage thereof, as long as it suited his purpose. Now that the question had arrived whether he should disgrace himself and his cause forever, by giving up to the mercy of savages like the Sioux, helpless women, the whole nature of the young man was stirred to its depths with remorse, and he hardly knew what to do.

Tom Biggs was perhaps the coolest member of the party, now that he was a prisoner. He had never felt much interest in the contest that was going on, one way or the other, like most of the poor whites of the south, and it was only the accident of his employer having taken up the Union side, that had put him in the place he occupied. He knew by sight many of the men in the party that had just captured him, and as they did not look sourly on him, but rather good-naturedly, as a possible proselyte, he assumed an air different from that of his chief and the Texan, who knew what was coming in the near future.

They were in a terrible dilemma, and all were puzzled what to do.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE OFFER.

AFTER some thought and a good deal of scowling, Rhett appeared to have made up his mind.

"Hyar," he said, with the strong Southern accent that marked him when he was angry and excited, though he could speak as well as any one at most times, "you-uns has got to come with us, and we'll see whether all the Injuns on the plains kin stop us. Git them muels aout, boys, and we'll go the other eend of the bad lands, and let the Injuns come arter us, ef they dar."

The order was obeyed at once, for the men of the party had already arrived at that rigid discipline that marked the Confederates as the war settled down into a stern reality, though, at first, they had been the most unruly of soldiers.

They took the prisoners and mules away, not rudely, but with a promptness that showed they would stand no nonsense.

The ladies were pale and trembling, even Mabel having forgotten her courage, now that she had white men of her own acquaintance for her foes, if she felt inclined to fight.

She preferred to use the weapons of her sex, to all appearance, for, she made an effort to smile courteously as she passed the young Texan leader of her enemies, bringing a deep flush to his cheek, as he bowed in answer. But he was too pre-occupied by the danger that surrounded him to be able to show much politeness, and before very long, the whole party had come to the mouth of the ravine where George had first seen the rebels coming, and found the prairie empty of foes, the Indians who had been there having, apparently, gone away.

"Seen anything?" asked Rhett of one of his sentries, as he came up.

"See'd a lot of smoke, Cap, and the Injuns

has gone off, like they was skeered," was the answer.

Then the other sentry pointed out over the prairie, to the other side of the bad lands, where some moving spots were to be seen.

"Thar's a great gatherin' out thar, Cap," he said.

Rhett nodded gloomily. He knew what the spots represented. Every one was a warrior in full panoply, and the numbers of the foes, which he would have to face, if he persisted in his refusal to give up the women, was likely to be a hundred times what he could muster himself, for the whole Sioux nation was up in arms.

But Rhett would not have been a Texan if he had not been convinced that a troop of forty well-armed white men could go anywhere and do anything in the Indian country. He gave the order to mount, and the rebel soldiers took their horses and got into line out on the open prairie, with the fugitives and their mules in the center.

Then the signal was given to move off, and the little procession started away from the bad lands, taking the course to the southwest, which would carry them toward the Confederate lines.

George Vance, as soon as he saw this, attempted to speak to the leader, but he had been consigned to the care of two men who rode by him, and one of them said sternly:

"None of that, stranger. The rest kin go whar they please; but you're a prisoner."

"But I want to speak to the captain," urged the young officer.

"The captain's busy, and when he wants to see you, he kin tell us," was the uncompromising reply, as the man in gray set his face like a flint against his prisoner.

George, resolved to have a word, called out:

"Captain Rhett, is this the way you keep your word to me? You promised to take the ladies to the Union lines."

Rhett turned in his saddle to say curtly:

"Stop that man's noise. If he won't be still, gag him, and tie his hands behind him."

"Very good, sir," replied George's grim guardian, and Vance knew, after such an answer, that there was no further use in resisting.

The whole band rode on in silence for some time, the prisoners in the middle going dejectedly on, the leader of the party scanning the prairie keenly as he went, and seeing that the moving dots in the distance were wandering to and fro at a rapid pace.

The men had got into a compact body, with a pair of scouts in the rear, about a quarter of a mile behind the main body, to guard against any surprise from the rear.

This precaution had not been taken in vain, for the party had not gone a mile from the place, when shots were heard behind them, and the two vedettes were seen coming in at a gallop, pursued by at least a hundred Indians at full speed.

George Vance heard the firing and turned pale as he looked at his mother and Mabel. At that moment he wished he had died in the ravine, rather than have surrendered to this man who appeared to have betrayed them.

But Rhett, as the difficulties increased round him, seemed to rise to them.

The very first shot brought from him the order:

"Prepare to fight on foot! Get off your critters, and put them in the middle. The Injuns want to stampede the stock. That's what thar arter."

His men had the advantage, against as many men from the East, that they had been brought up in the vicinity of Indians, and knew a good many of their tricks already, so that they were not as nervous as the same number of Union soldiers of that day would have been, in such a case.

They knew that, in fighting Indians, the utmost coolness is requisite, and that a flurry is just what the Indians are watching for.

As the order left the lips of the captain, they jumped off their horses, as they rode in fours, three out of every four going on foot, so as to have thirty men on the ground, with ten more leading the horses.

The men on foot deployed into a circle to cover all the animals in the center, exhibiting no fear whatever, though the Indians were charging down on them with loud yells, as if they intended to annihilate them.

But, as the savage rush drew nearer, and Mabel clung to Mrs. Vance, shrinking from the shock, there was a swerving motion of the whole Indian line, and every warrior disappeared over the side of his horse, while the whole band swept past, out of gunshot, not attempting to

charge home, as they had promised to do, by their actions.

But George, who had expected as much, from the known character of Indians, was more uneasy than before as he marked their conduct.

From his elevated position (for he had not been dismounted from his horse, and the rest of the party was below him), he could see that more Indians were coming out of the bad lands, from the very ravine from which he himself had issued, and it seemed as if the stream would never stop, while the moving dots, at the other end of the same system, was gradually disappearing in the bowels of the earth.

It became evident to him that the Indians were biding their time, knowing that the only safety of the white men lay in remaining in the shelter of the bad lands, and that they had resolved not to let them get that advantage again, if they could help it.

Rhett saw this too, and began to look bothered, as he noted that the Indians who had passed his party had halted in the prairie, and seemed disposed to dispute the way to the southwest.

They had drawn up in a long line, and the individuals composing the line were moving to and fro, as if settling a plan of action with each other, as they watched the white men, who had come to a halt.

George, who was anxious to get Rhett to keep his promise toward him, took the opportunity, when he saw the commander near him, to say:

"Mr. Rhett, if I were you, I would push for the fort. You can never get through these Indians, back to the Confederate lines, without losing all our scalps, and it is better to be taken prisoners, and treated properly, than to have the Indians make mince-meat of you, and roast you alive besides."

Rhett looked up at him in a peevish manner that surprised George, as he snapped out:

"Keep your advice to yourself. I know what I am doing. I don't fear those fellows a bit. It is to take care of these ladies, that I am running all this danger."

"Then why don't you take the way to the fort?" asked George.

Rhett bit his lip.

"Because I can't reconcile it to my conscience to let Southern ladies go into the hands of the Yanks," he said. "I've got a proposition to make to them. It is nothing to you what it is; but it will save all their lives. I want to see the young lady alone, at a little distance from the rest. If you consent freely, it will be well for you, and may save all your lives."

George was astonished at the demand.

"You are master of all here," he said stiffly, "until the Indians come to take us all away. It is a farce for you to ask my permission to see any of your prisoners alone."

The Texan flushed deeply at something George could not understand. If the idea had not been absurd, George could have fancied that he actually looked ashamed of what he was doing.

He walked up to the side of Mabel's mule, and said awkwardly:

"Can I speak to you, miss, for a moment, alone?"

The girl looked down at him with the smile of her sex, when they want to deceive a man, and answered in the sweetest way:

"With pleasure, Captain Rhett."

Then Rhett, looking very red in the face, and apparently unconscious of the imminent danger that surrounded them, led her mule to one side, and, when he had got her apart from the rest, asked her the singular question:

"Miss Fay, would you marry me to save your life?"

CHAPTER XII.

A LOVER'S RUSE.

MABEL FAY, like most ladies, young and old, had had dreams of the way in which the first proposal of marriage would come to her, but she had never, in her wildest imaginings, thought that it would come like this.

Here, in the midst of a wild prairie, with a howling mob of Indians thirsting for blood and every sort of outrage, death staring the whole party in the face, this young Texan coolly asked her whether "she would be willing to marry him?" True, he added, "to save her life;" but the idea that her marriage could have anything to do with that, seemed so absurd to her, that she indignantly cried:

"Sir, are you mad, to ask such a question at such a time? Did you bring me here, in the midst of savages, to insult me like this?"

Rhett cast a glance at the prairie round him, before he answered. The Indians were still coming out of the ravines, and passing toward the southwest, to intercept his flight to the open

prairie. No actual firing had yet begun, but it might begin at any moment; and when it did, there would be no more chance for negotiations.

He looked up at Mabel, in the most innocent way in the world, as he answered:

"I did not mean to insult you, Miss Fay; but the fact is the Indians want to have you given up to them, and they are friends of ours. I don't see what I am to say to them, if they demand you from me. They don't understand the scruples of a white man, because they are not white, you know. The only thing they understand is that we are their friends, and bound to help them against the Yankee Government. Now, I don't want to offend them, and they don't want to quarrel with us, if they can help it. But they want the ladies, and there is only one way I can keep them without a fight. If it comes to a fight, you know, we shall all be killed, and it won't do any good to any one. But if they thought, for instance, that you were my wife, and the old lady was my mother, and that I had been hunting for you all this time, it would give me something to go on with them, and they wouldn't want to have it said that they stole away the wife of one of their best friends. That's what I mean. Of course I don't expect that a lady like you would be so good as to think well of a man like me, who is only a rancher, after all, and not well educated; but I thought that, to save your life, you might not object to being called my wife, just before the Indians."

Mabel Fay looked at the young man with a new light in her eyes.

"Then you don't mean to ask me really to marry you, but only to make believe, to fool the Indians. Is that the way you mean?"

She asked the question with an arch smile that made the young man's face redder than ever, as he cast down his eyes, unable to meet hers.

"No, I don't mean that, exactly," he said, in a low tone. "Of course I wouldn't dare to ask you right out, on such a short acquaintance, but, all the same, I would if I dared, you know, Miss Fay; for you're right pretty, and right smart, too. But we haven't got much time to lose now, so what do you say to what I have asked you?"

"I say that if there is no other way of saving our lives, I will do anything that is not wrong," said Mabel, the color rising in her own cheek at the singular situation in which she was being placed.

Then she added, resolutely:

"But I would rather be dead with the rest than see them suffer. If I consent to this you must let my cousin go."

"Your cousin!" echoed Rhett, astonished.

"And who is your cousin?"

"George Vance," she said, proudly. "I am willing to do a great deal to save his life, for you are aware that if he goes back to Arkansas, he is liable to be tried and shot for breaking his parole. He never would have done it if it had not been for his father and mother. He ventured all to save them from the hardships that surrounded them where they were. I saw it all, Mr. Rhett. I would rather let the Indians do their will with me than be saved at his expense. I can escape their tortures by death, and I am ready to die, but not to betray my cousin."

The Texan listened to her attentively. When she had finished there was a new expression on his face as he asked:

"And suppose I should let your cousin escape, would you marry me in earnest?"

This time she flushed crimson.

"Who said anything of the sort, sir?" she asked, haughtily. "Is it usual for Southern gentlemen to bribe ladies to win their favor, or to speak when they are in sore need and take advantage of their necessities?"

The question shamed Rhett; for he flushed as red as she had, and said in a low tone:

"No, Miss Fay, I do not mean that."

Then he turned away and said, in a resigned way:

"Then we must all die together. I am glad that you are ready to die. Have you a weapon?"

"I have," she answered, turning paler at the question.

"Then, as you will not accept my offer to save your lives, there is only one thing to do, and that is to sell them as dearly as we can," replied the Texan. "I dare not let your cousin go, for it would be against my orders, and my duty is above all the rest, though you mightn't believe it."

And he was going back to his men, when the girl, in an impulse she could not resist, called out:

"Stay; there is one other way."

The eager manner in which he turned round showed her that he had not been deceiving her in asking her to become his wife. Love shone in every line of his face, as he said:

"Speak on. I will do anything, if it is not against my duty."

Mabel flushed as she spoke out again:

"If I consent to be called your wife, for the purpose of deceiving the Indians, will you let my uncle and aunt go to the Union lines, and give me your word that my cousin shall not be killed for breaking his parole?"

"I will," he said, heartily. "I would not have come after him if I had thought he was to be tried for anything of the sort, and the old gentleman ought not to suffer for what he has done, anyhow. That is fair, isn't it?"

"Then do with me as you please," she said; and with that he rejoined the rest of the party, and said aloud, in the hearing of Vance:

"Don't be afraid, any of you; I have thought of a way to get the Indians to leave us. Miss Fay here has promised to be my wife, and the Indians won't dare to disturb the wife of one of their friends. I'll take you to the Yankee lines at once. Where's that Injun Charley?"

Injun Charley made his appearance considerably mystified.

"See here, Charley," said the Texan; "if the Indians thought this lady was my wife, wouldn't they let her go?"

The man nodded.

"Reckon they would, Cap. But thar's the other lady—the old one. Injuns is suspicious."

"That lady is my mother, and the old gentleman is my father, and don't you forget it," said Rhett, coolly. "What would they say to that, Charley?"

Charley grinned.

"It would take the starch out of them, Cap. But they moutn't want the prisoner. It's hard to give up everything, when they've lost so many men as those fellers have."

Rhett hesitated at the answer, and seemed to be in deep thought for a minute or two, during which the Indians, coming out of the ravine, were increasing in numbers. At last he smote his hand on his thigh, as if he had an idea, and exclaimed:

"I've got it, boys. The lieutenant shall have a chance; the best we kin give him; but the ladies shan't be hurt. See here, lieutenant, come hyar."

He drew George to one side.

"You see that mare, thar," he said.

He pointed to a handsome thoroughbred mare, that stood among the rest of the horses, and wore the caparisons of an officer. It was, in fact, his own spare horse, led in the company at most times.

"That mare," said the Texan, "is a ripper. I never see the pony that could ketch her, and she'll go like the wind till she drops. I can't let you go free; fur that's ag'in' orders, lieutenant, and no man never said Frank Rhett disobeyed his orders, no matter what they moutn't be. But, all the same, ef you was to git to that mar', kinder sly-like, and scoot, the best you knowed haow, it moutn't be the best way to cut this 'ere knot. I'm gwine to take the old folks to the Yankee lines, and ef the young lady comes back to the sunny South, whar she was born, it ain't my fault; but I don't wanter see you in a hobble, for you're a fust-rate feller, or you couldn't have done what you have. You understand me? Now don't talk. I don't wanter hyar no talk outer no one, jest naow. But you've had the word. I shall hev to give you up to the Injuns, ef they kin ketch ye. That's all."

And he went back to his men, without another word, leaving George in a puzzle, whether the hint, given to him, was a trap or meant in earnest.

While he was thinking of this, he saw Frank Rhett ride out in front of his men, and begin to make signals to the Indians, that showed he wanted to talk to them.

The signal was greeted with a yell, and a trio of horsemen came tearing down, as if the Indians were as glad as the whites that the difficulty was likely to be adjusted peaceably.

George Vance saw Rhett greet their chief, who came in the advance, with great cordiality and at the same moment he began to creep toward the mare, of which such a broad hint had been given to him.

As he reached her side, Rhett and the Indian chiefs met.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

INJUN CHARLEY, the interpreter, went with Rhett, and, as far as George could see, the interview seemed to be peaceable enough.

There was a good deal of gesticulation, which was so pantomimic, that the looker-on could make out what was meant.

Rhett was saying that he did not want to be at enmity with his dear friends, and the Indians were making the most extravagant demonstrations of love and affection. Then came something which he took for an allusion to the enemy both were interested in beating, and the white man promised to do his best to help his red brothers in the fight.

Then the interpreter made a proposition to the Indians, which the latter seemed to hesitate about accepting, for a long time, while he tried everything he knew to overcome their scruples. At last the difficulty appeared to be settled, for the Indians rode away, and the white man came back and called out aloud:

"The Injuns want a man to torture, and as the prisoner is the only one I kin give 'em, he'll have to take his chances of life. I've agreed to give up Lieutenant Vance to them if they'll spare the rest and they have agreed to give him a chance to run fur his life. That's the best I could do."

George listened intently to what was said, and, the moment that Rhett had finished, he took the reins of the mare softly in his hand. The man who was leading her had his head turned the other way, and the occasion seemed to be as propitious as any other that could have been given him.

As he took the reins in his hand he noticed that the man who was leading the mare let go, though his head was turned the other way, as if he had been let into the plot.

The next moment, George sprang upon the animal's back and shook her rein, when she tore away, as if she needed no more encouragement.

The flight of the prisoner was the signal for Rhett to shout out:

"Git your carbines ready, boys; but don't fire, unless you're sure you can't hit the mare. I don't want her hurt, fur a thousand dollars."

The men took the broad hint, and unslinging their carbines, but did not break ranks in pursuit, and in a very few minutes after that, George Vance was out of gunshot from them.

The Indians were still at a distance from him, but they barred his way to the northeast, where he wished to go, and he flew off to the southeast, with the intention of cutting across, if he could, and getting round them.

He was unarmed, save for a small pistol, which he carried hidden in the breast of his coat, and which he had saved from the general disarmament when he surrendered.

His situation was one of extreme peril, but he thought nothing of that compared to the fact that the Indians had agreed to spare his father and mother, to say nothing of Mabel, and as he flew away he kept looking back at the party he had left.

They had resumed their progress to the East, in the very direction he wished to go himself, and the Indians were clearing out of their path, as if to carry out the compact they had made.

The most favorable symptom was that the red-men did not seem to be at all in a hurry to come after him, for they spread out in a long line to bar his way, save into the recesses of the bad lands; and he slackened to a walk as he saw this, for he knew that they must feel very confident of being able to catch him when they wished, and he knew that his life depended on the speed of his mare at the critical moment, and resolved to save her.

He reflected that Rhett would not have made such a point in speaking of the mare, if he had not believed her capable of saving his life.

And then a thought came into his head which called a flush to his cheek, and mad him pull up for a moment, and stare at the party of men in gray, as if he had almost made up his mind to go back.

"He said that Mabel had promised to be his wife," muttered George to himself. "It is not possible that she can have done that. She never saw him in all her life before, and must have been fooling him, for some reason. If I had any idea that he meant it in earnest—"

The young man ground his teeth, but at that moment the Indians began to turn their attention toward him, and he rode away, in the hope of leading them a round-about, which might give him a chance to scrape by them.

The odds were great, but the way in which the mare swept on showed him that Rhett had not exaggerated her capacity.

The easy stride and rapid passage of the animal convinced him that he had under him a regular racer, and he began to wish that he had some arms with him.

He felt that, if he had, he might have a chance

to fight his way out, in spite of the odds arrayed against him.

But all the wishing would not bring him the weapons, and he was constrained to make the best of his way onward, in the hopes of outriding the Indians, if he could not fight them.

He took a diagonal course, and it soon brought him in front of the body of Indians, gathered at the other end of the bad lands, into which they had been streaming before the parley and agreement with Rhett.

Now they had drawn up in a line, and seemed to be waiting for him to run into their hands, without resistance.

As he drew nearer, he altered his course, and, the moment he did so, they began to walk their ponies toward him.

He did not increase his pace, for he found that the mare was a fast walker, and hoped to scrape by stealthily.

For nearly ten minutes more he kept on his course, the Indians all the time getting closer and closer to him, as the converging lines got nearer to each other.

At last both parties were not more than a hundred and fifty yards apart, and he saw that the Indians were getting impatient. The younger warriors were talking to each other, and urging their ponies to walk fast, as if they had begun to find out that the mare was beating them. Then George Vance shook his rein and darted off at a sharp gallop, and the instant he did so, the whole mob of Indians opened in full cry, and came tearing after him.

Then he turned his horse and fled straight away from them, to test the speed of the animal he rode. Finesse would avail him no more. It was a straight chase after him, and the direction in which he was going would take him, he thought, to the Missouri river, at some point lower than the fort, but still in the neighborhood of Union settlements.

The Indians behind him yelled their loudest to frighten him and make him ride harder than he should; but he had heard of this trick from an old sergeant of his company, and resolved that, if they caught him, it should be through no mistake of his, if he could help it.

Every now and then he cast a swift glance at his pursuers, over his shoulder, and it seemed to him that they were not gaining on him, though he was not gaining on them either.

It was a trying situation for him, for he had never been chased by Indians before, and had heard all sorts of stories as to their marvelous wiles in pursuit, and the way in which they could get more speed out of a horse than any white man that ever lived.

But he trusted to the speed of the mare he rode, and did not increase his pace at all, as long as he could keep the Indians at the distance which they possessed at first.

They did not seem to be provided with good fire-arms, or else did not want to trust to them, for there was no firing at him, for some time.

In this way he rode, at a hand-gallop, for near half an hour, when he cast another glance at his pursuers, and it seemed to him that they had lost a little distance.

He was not sure of it at first, but he could see that their ponies were laboring, while his own mare was going as well as ever, and it occurred to him to try what he could do by increasing the pace.

He pressed the spurs lightly to the sides of the mare, and she increased her speed, with rapid bounds, that satisfied him she was not yet jaded by the race.

He kept up the faster pace for another quarter of an hour, and, when he looked back, this time, was delighted to see that he had increased the lead to at least three hundred yards, while the foremost Indians were getting their rifles ready, to fire at him or his horse.

That sight sent the spurs into the mare, in good earnest, and away she tore, at such a pace that he found he was leaving the Indians, faster than before.

But the direction he was taking was not that which he wished to pursue, and he thought that he had acquired a sufficient lead to enable him to try another change.

He altered his course slightly, and sent his mare to her utmost speed, with the result that the Indians began to gain on him, by cutting off the corner.

As they got nearer to him, they began to fire, and before he could gain the direction he had in his mind, he was compelled to alter his course again, and go straight away from them, to save himself from being shot. As it was, the bullets whistled uncomfortably close to him, and he knew that, if one struck the horse, he would be sure to be taken.

Another change; a fresh ride at speed for another quarter of an hour, and at last he had gained his point.

CHAPTER XIV.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

He had headed the Indians at last, and they realized it, and were firing at him, with a vicious intent about which there was no mistake.

Luckily for him, like most of their race, they were very poor marksmen, not having enough ammunition at command for the purposes of practice; so that none of the shots hit him or his mare. He had headed them, and the prairie was clear in his front. How long it would remain so, he could not tell. The Indians in the rear were dropping further off of the race at every minute, and he took a glance back to see if he could gain any intelligence of the white men, who had gone off with his father and mother.

To his surprise he saw the dark body, which he recognized as the troop of Confederates, about three miles off, almost on a parallel course with his own, showing that they must have taken the same direction, from the other end of the bad lands.

And, as the Indians in his own rear found they could not catch him, they began to sheer off in the direction of the other party, as if they wished to get a chance at somebody, to sate their anger at the slaughter which had been made in the defense of the ravines.

The sight sent a cold shudder through him, for he realized that, if they took a fancy to break their pledges to Rhett, they could do so with but little danger to themselves, while he would be taken at a disadvantage in the prairie, and would have no shelter.

He had almost made up his mind to try and lead the Indians away from them, by offering them a chance to come up with him, when he saw some moving spots on the horizon, ahead of him, and, at the same time, the Indians, who had been in the act of giving up the chase, uttered a wild yell of triumph, and came on harder than before. Then he realized that he was running into the midst of more Indians, and began to urge his mare again.

The spots on the horizon were dead ahead of him, and he recognized them as horsemen, coming down to meet him. He realized also that the Indians had been waiting for these very men, in the assurance that they would get him in the end of the chase, not unwilling to give him all the tortures they could, by exciting his hopes, only to dash them again.

His heart began to beat fast and hard, as he saw the spots rapidly nearing him, and he began to feel that sense of hopeless despair which he had heard the old sergeant speak of, as the precursor of falling into the hands of the Indians. He felt that he was losing his coolness and set his teeth as he muttered to himself:

"No, they shall not have that triumph! I will escape! I will escape! I shall escape! yes, yes!"

Repeating these words to himself, he managed to keep up his courage, and kept on his course with more steadiness than he had done before.

The agony would soon be over, he thought; for the spots in advance were coming on so rapidly that he could already see, with the naked eye, they were horsemen.

And then something produced a great revolution of feeling.

It was a flash, and it came from the rear of the oncoming horsemen.

It was the flash of a weapon of steel, and he recognized that the Indians, coming down on him, were fleeing from an enemy in their rear.

"It must be that California Joe has found the troops, and they are coming down to help us," he said to himself.

Then he drew out the little pistol from the bosom of his coat, and rode steadily toward the Indians in front, having already a safe distance from those in the rear.

The crisis was coming!

A little more and he saw them plainly, their pursuers behind them at about a mile distance, a long line of cavalry and infantry, in regular order of battle, with a little band of scouts in front, pressing the Indians close, to make them stop as often as possible, and give time to the others to come up.

The attention of the Indians in his front was engaged with the scouts, and he hoped to pull through in safety.

There was not much time for reflection; for, in another moment, he was facing the mob of fugitives, and the foremost was hailing him in a strange tongue, in words he took for a challenge to know who he was.

Then it struck him that the gray coat he wore might serve a good turn, if he used it with discretion. The Indians appeared to be in amity with the rebel troop that had come into the Northwest in chase of himself.

He hastily made the Indian sign of amity, by raising his open palm toward the runners in front, and kept on his course as if he desired to get through them, and take a nearer look at the enemy in front.

The ruse succeeded so far that none of the Indians fired at him, and he got through the line, unharmed; but, as soon as they saw him continue his course toward the distant scouts, coming on so rapidly, the whole band opened fire as fast as they could, as if they had but just discovered the trick he had played.

The bullets whistled round him so close that he expected to get struck every moment, and he felt one or two sharp twinges, that satisfied him he was grazed.

Then the scouts began to fire, with a rapidity that showed they had breech-loading rifles, and yelled lustily, with the view of frightening the Indians from their prey.

George, with the one idea of getting to them; plied his spurs till the high-spirited mare ran away like a deer, and the next thing he knew he heard the voices of white men, and was galloping back to the distant line of troops, with a mob of Indians after him, including all the pursuers he had had, with the fresh men that he had met; but the scouts were round him, while the voice of California Joe was shouting:

"Well done, lieutenant. I told ye, I'd bring help, and by gum, I've done it, sir."

He was riding at speed as he spoke, and the rest of the scouts were doing the same, for their pursuers, encouraged by the presence of the Indians that had been chasing George Vance, were coming on like the wind, as if they hoped to overtake and crush the scouts, before they could reach the shelter of the troops.

They had to turn round and fire in retreat, to keep off the too pressing attentions of the Indians, and then there was a shout from the front, as they came in sight of the cavalry, and the whole line of horsemen, with drawn sabers, came on at a steady and imposing trot, which had such an effect on the Indians that they abandoned the pursuit, and halted to stare and wait for their friends.

George Vance had an opportunity to ride into the front of the first regiment, and California Joe, as soon as he got there, rode up by his side, and called out to an officer in front:

"Hyar, Cap! hyar's Looenant Vance, at last. By gum, he had a narrer squeak of it though."

The officer in front was a handsome man, with a black beard. He wore the uniform of the captain of the staff.

He looked at George with surprise, and said:

"Are you really Lieutenant Vance, of the cavalry? We thought that you had gone over to the enemy, for certain. You are very welcome. We came out on purpose to find you, and now we can afford to have some fun, I hope."

George looked round him with surprise. He had never seen a volunteer in his life; for he had been serving in Texas, in the old regular army, when the rebellion broke out, and had been taken, with the rest of the troops in Texas, since which he had been kept in close confinement on his father's plantation, till the time of his escape. He had no idea that the volunteers had been brought to such a pitch of discipline, and asked the question at once:

"What regiment is this, sir, may I ask, and who are you?"

"I am Captain Colville of General S.'s staff, and this regiment is the — Indiana Cavalry. The other is the — Michigan, and, for green men, I can assure you that they have done uncommonly well, in their first campaign. Would you like to be sent to the general, Mr. Vance, or prefer to do what you can to help us in whipping these red scamps in front?"

George turned round to look for the party with which he knew that his dearest relations were.

"I came from Arkansas, with my mother and father," he said, "and we were taken prisoners, only this morning, by a party of Confederates, who are in alliance with the Indians. They were in sight, not long ago; but I suppose they have seen your force coming, and have fled into the bad lands. I will stay with you, with your permission, till we have found them, for I fear the worst, now that the Indians will realize that I have escaped their tortures."

Colville seemed to be surprised at the news.

"Confederates up here!" he exclaimed. "Are you quite sure, sir? Remember that there are white men among these Indians, that have married Indian women, and they are up to any sort of deviltry. They might have deceived you, in order to secure your surrender."

"There is no mistake about the thing. The name of the commanding officer is Rhett, and he comes from the state of Texas. I should never have surrendered to anything short of a regular force, you may be sure. But Captain—ah—"

"Colville, sir, Colville."

"Captain Colville, there is a young lady in the power of these men; and my mother and father are there too."

Colville seemed to be shocked at the news, for he said at once:

"That is terrible. The general must know it. We must, at any hazard, rescue them. If the Indians get them, you know what devils they are, sir."

Then he turned and gave the order to go on at once, and make for the bad lands that they could see ahead of them, like a dark line on the face of the prairie.

The line of cavalry swept on at a slow trot, and Indians were to be seen coming in on all sides, from every quarter of the horizon, their numbers exceeding anything that Colville had dreamed of, for they came in a cloud like so many locusts, and California Joe, who had been in the advance, came back with a grave face, to say to the officer in command:

"Cap, it seems to me that the hull Injun nation is out to-day. We'd best go slow, till the walk-a-heaps come up."

And indeed George Vance, who thought he had seen all the warriors in the force opposing them, was astonished to see, coming over the prairie, from all quarters, more Indians than he had ever dreamed of being in the Northwest, showing that, not only was the Sioux nation out, but other tribes also, and explaining the meaning of the smoke-signals, which had been repeated all over the prairie, the day before.

The force of the Indians could not have numbered less than two thousand warriors, gathered round the edge of the bad lands, where they seemed to be determined to defend themselves.

Colville, with all his dash and ambition, was content, this time, to wait for the coming up of his hitherto rather despised commander, whose caution, at other times in the way, was just what was wanted in the emergency in which the cavalry found itself, by the sudden appearance of the Indians from the bad lands.

The savages had already begun to hover round the cavalry, pressing it in their turn, and the situation of affairs became grave. Just then the infantry bugle was heard, and General S. drove up in his ambulance.

CHAPTER XV.

CLEARING FOR ACTION.

In the mean time what had become of the Vance family, left in the hands of white men, excited against them by the violent hatred of a civil war, and surrounded by savages who thirsted for their blood, and were only restrained from immediate slaughter by the presence of the little handful of men in gray? They felt, as they saw the thronging swarms of Indians making their appearance on every side that they existed on sufferance only.

When George Vance dashed away in his apparently mad effort to escape, Mabel Fay's cheek paled and flushed alternately, as she watched him, and George's mother trembled violently, as she faltered to her husband:

"Oh, what will become of him? It was a monstrous piece of cruelty to let him be killed before the eyes of his own mother."

Rhett heard the low complaint, and it touched him in a tender spot, for he said to her:

"Don't be alarmed, madam. I have given the gentleman all the chance that he could have for escape in the position in which we are. It was a hard choice they gave us, anyway. They wanted to get the whole of your party to do as they pleased with; and it cost me a mighty sight of negotiation before they would be satisfied with one victim. But they don't know the speed of that mare, and if the lieutenant is the man I take him for, he is going to get out of this scrape alive. You see if he isn't."

Then he gave the signal for advance, and the whole party moved forward toward the bad lands from which they had lately emerged, in a compact body, with the four prisoners, as they undoubtedly were, in the center, the men being strung out in a circle around them, ready to resist any sign of treachery from the Indians.

In this way they traversed the space to the bad lands, while the eyes of the prisoners were strained over the prairie to see what had become of the fugitive, who was seen walking his horse deliberately into the close vicinity of a great cloud of Indians at the other side of the bad lands.

Soon the crowds of warriors blotted the single rider from view, and the Indians, at the end to which they were approaching, began to stream off in that direction, as if attracted by the spectacle.

Rhett took advantage of their distraction to pass the bad lands and take his course to the east, in performance of his promise.

"You see, Miss Fay, that I am keeping my word, at much hazard to myself. If the lieutenant escapes from them, and I give you up to the Yankees, it will be a dangerous thing for me; but since I have promised, I am going to perform my promise, at any cost."

She favored him with a glance of great gratitude, and said in a low tone:

"You are doing a noble act, sir. It is a pity that you cannot do still better."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that, if you would join the ranks of the Union, instead of consorting with—"

He interrupted her abruptly.

"I am sorry to be rude to a lady, Miss Fay; but you are tempting me to dishonor. I must stick to my colors, as I began. If I do what I have promised, you have no right to ask me to do more."

And with that he rode away to the head of his party, and came near her no more. They went on for another half-hour, when the faint distant yells of the Indians, on the side where George Vance had gone, made the ladies tremble again and the men in gray cast curious glances that way.

Pretty soon Rhett called out:

"By heavens, he's headed them at last! Boys, the Yankee officer is a good man. Look at that!"

He pointed out on the prairie, to where George Vance, conspicuous on the bay mare, was riding at a gallop in front of the Indians, the puffs of smoke telling they were firing at him, but he still keeping his course, as if he bore a charmed life.

His mother watched him, with her whole soul in her eyes; and so the chase and flight went on, till one of the men in the ranks uttered an exclamation, which caused the leader to look round, with the stern query:

"Who told you to talk? Who was that?"

"It was I, sir," said a stalwart fellow, with tow-colored hair, as he saluted respectfully. "I beg your pardon, captain; but don't you see suthin' beyond where the Yankee officer is running the mare so hard?"

Rhett looked round and peered under his hand in the direction indicated.

Then he halted his command with a gesture, and examined the suspicious appearance with much interest and attention.

The eyes of the prisoners also turned that way, and they soon perceived the gleam of steel, which had encouraged George Vance so much, when he first saw it.

Mrs. Vance uttered an exclamation of thankful-

ness which called forth a frown from Rhett. He turned his horse, with the curt order to his men, as he led the way back to the ravines:

"Counter-march, march! It's the Yankees, boys; and we've got to dust."

He had detected the coming of the enemy, and realized why the Indians had not attempted to prevent him from going that way. All his resolutions to give up the prisoners to the enemy vanished, as soon as he saw them really coming. He knew that he would have to be in a favorable position for defense, if he hoped to open any sort of parley with a regular force, and he was amazed and not a little alarmed at the numbers he saw approaching him. He had not expected anything more than a scouting party.

To regain the bad lands, and take up a position there, was the obvious course suggested by the sight of the oncoming Union force, and within twenty minutes after the first sight of the gleam of steel, the men in gray were in the bad lands again, the Indians near them, scattered all round the edges, and prepared for a desperate defense of the place, assisted by the ground.

The alliance between the Confederates and the red-men, which had seemed in danger of being broken, was made doubly secure by the presence of a danger that menaced both.

Rhett, accompanied by his interpreter, became the commander of the whole force of the Indians for the time; and the prisoners saw the chiefs coming to him for advice, while the force at disposal was put into a position that would defy the efforts of anything short of double their numbers, and, in the mean time, the prisoners were left almost unguarded, in the ravine near the prairie; even the Indians, who had been eying them hungrily up to that time, not seeming to notice them any more, in the presence of the imminent danger, that was coming closer every moment.

The prisoners remained huddled together at the edge of the ravine, where they had been left, watching the slow advance of the Union forces, hoping against hope that they might be saved without bloodshed.

CHAPTER XVI.

COMPLETING THE INVESTMENT.

When the old general came driving up in his ambulance, he cast a scrutinizing look over the scene of conflict, and said to Colville, sternly:

"You have come too far, sir. Did you not receive my message from Mr. Brown?"

"No, general," said the staff officer, with the most unblushing effrontery. "Mr. Brown shouted something to me in the middle of the row that was going on with the Indians, but I did not understand it, sir. Besides, we were already engaged with the Indians, and I thought that you would not like to lose prestige by giving way to a handful of savages."

The general frowned deeply.

"A handful!" he echoed. "It is what I call a pretty large handful, sir. I have seen a good many Indians in my life, but I never saw them in such force, or so determined. Now, we shall have to fight, whether we will or no."

Colville could hardly help the smile that rose to his lip when he heard the general say that. He had expected that S. would insist on withdrawing the men from the battle, in the face of the Indians, when he anticipated a general rush from the savages in their best point of fighting: harassing a retreat.

But General S., though slow to enter a fight, yet, when it was once well in hand, was equally slow to leave it.

He looked keenly out on the whole field, while the infantrymen were slowly coming up into position. He turned his glass first to one side, and then the other, and at last said:

"Colville, we can't drive them out of that. But if we can drive them in, it will be something."

"Drive them in, general?" asked the staff officer, puzzled. "I don't understand, sir."

The old Indian-fighter grinned.

"Ay, ay! you boys think you know the whole business, and sometimes you don't. Don't you see that the Imps have resolved to cling to the bad lands? They know that we can't storm them, and they are right there. But if they once get into the ravines, all we shall need will be to guard the openings, and starve them out."

Then he leaned out of the ambulance, and called his orderly to bring up his horse.

The animal was brought, and the old man, with his silvery hair and stout, unwieldy frame, got out of the vehicle and mounted the charger.

Once on its back he seemed transformed to a warrior, which he had not looked before.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "you shall see if those confounded reporters were right, that I am too old for Indian-fighting."

Most of the officers grinned behind his back, for it was notorious that the veteran had been very much put out by correspondents of the Eastern papers, who had been hanging around Fort Blake writing letters to the East, in which they blamed his inactive policy, and called on the Government to put a younger man in his place.

He seemed resolved to show them that he had not outlived his activity, for from that moment he arranged matters with a skill that showed he had not boasted in vain.

He sent the cavalry to the rear, and caused a general advance of the infantry on the entrance to the bad lands, before which the Indians fled in dismay; for they could not face the rolling volleys of long-range rifles that preceded the advance of the "walk-a-heaps."

Some went into the bad lands, from which a heavy fire was opened, but more went round the

edge, as if loth to abandon their ponies and the open prairie.

In twenty minutes from the time the general arrived, there was not an Indian on their front, in sight on the prairie.

A regiment of infantry was left in a semi-circle round the only opening on that side, while the rest of the troops took up their march to the other end of the system, driving the Indians beyond them with perfect ease, the firing being all distant and hardly anybody being hurt.

All this time the general had been too busy taking care of his troops to notice anything else, and George Vance, who was still unarmed, did not offer to obtrude himself on his notice.

But as the advance went quietly on, the old general found time to glance here and there, and at last spied George in his gray homespun suit, riding on the handsome mare that had done him such good service.

The general rode up to him, and taking him for one of the camp followers, said to him curtly:

"Here, you are not wanted here, my man. Go back to the train. You'll get hurt here."

George saluted in military style, replying:

"I beg your pardon, general, but I am not one of the mule-drivers. My name is Vance, and I have but just made my escape from the Indians."

The general favored him with a quick glance from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Hem! So you're the young fellow that we have been making all this fuss about. Why didn't you report to me when you saw me first?"

"Because I saw that you were busy, general. I have the honor to report now, and to ask that you will give me some duty to do."

"Why, certainly, you can come on my staff. I am very glad to see you, sir, and I only wish I had more officers of the army with me. These volunteers are very zealous; but I fear we can't depend on them at a pinch."

"They seem to be doing their work very well, so far, general."

"Yes, yes, sir; I don't deny it. But—by the by—didn't I hear something about your having some of your family with you? Where are they?"

George's face fell, as he answered:

"They are yonder in the hands of the Indians, general. I should not be here, but for the fact that a troop of Confederates, from Arkansas, came up and induced me to surrender, on the promise of safe conduct to the lines for my family. They have broken their word, for they gave me up to the Indians, while the whole of my family, including my mother, father, and a young lady cousin, are in the bad lands, in the power of the Indians and their rebel allies."

The general listened intently, with much frowning and screwing up of his wrinkled old face. "Hum! hum!" was all he said. "That's bad, very bad, indeed. Very bad."

Then he sunk into thought for awhile, as the advance continued, and at last shook his head, as if throwing off a weight from his mind, and said to George:

"It is a bad case, sir; but not hopeless. Go to Captain Colville, and ask him to supply you with a sword and revolver, and announce you as an additional aide. You want work to keep you from brooding on the state of your family. If it lies in the hands of man to save them, it shall be done."

George bowed low, and hurried off to do as he was told.

Colville expressed himself as much pleased with what the general had done, and supplied him, not only with the weapons of an officer, but with an undress uniform of his own, which made Vance feel, for the first time since the surrender in Texas, that he was again a part of the great army of Uncle Samuel.

Then he rode forward with the rest, and in two hours from that time, the Indians had been driven into the other end of the bad lands, all but a few, who were hovering round, as if to act as spies on the prairie.

The investment was complete, for there were but two ways to leave the bad lands, and these were marked by the trail of the herds of buffalo, that had used them for centuries.

Then Captain Colville had to acknowledge that his old commander knew how to fight Indians; for the narrowness of the exits made their guard a matter which only occupied a small part of the force at his disposal, and the Indians were secured, for the nonce, as if they had been put into a bottle.

They were safe from attack, but they were also prevented from coming out to fight, save at a great disadvantage.

Then the old general beckoned to George Vance, who had ridden up near him, and said to him, in a tone of great relief:

"Mr. Vance, we have had better fortune than I could have anticipated. You say your family is in the power of the Indians? I propose to open a parley with the enemy, and do what I can to save your people from extermination. As you are aware, the Indians have us at a disadvantage, in one thing. They know that we never slaughter prisoners, while their habit is to kill every person they think they cannot carry off to slavery. If the matter is not carefully managed, they may massacre all those in their power, and we shall be as badly off as ever. If you have any suggestion to make, I am willing to hear it."

George had listened to him with a beating heart. As the general had said, the situation was full of difficulty.

"I almost wish, sir," he said, "that I had not made my escape and left those helpless ones to perish—"

"You are wrong there, sir," the general interrupted peremptorily. "You are an officer of the United States, and sworn to do your duty. It was your duty to save yourself, for the service of your country. You did right. Strictly speaking, I have no right to take account of the prisoners, save as American citizens, and some people may doubt whether I am justified in periling this large command to save— How many did you say there are in the power of the Indians, sir?"

"Four, general. My father, Colonel Vance, my mother, Mrs. Vance, Miss Mabel Fay, and our old overseer, Thomas Biggs."

"That is enough, sir. They shall be saved, if you can suggest a way."

George looked round him rather gloomily. Then, as his eye lighted on the scouts, he said:

"Perhaps, general, the scouts might make a plan for us."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

GENERAL S. nodded approvingly. "The scouts are just the men to make a suggestion, sir. They are used to Indians, and know how to negotiate with them, better than we, whose duty is to fight them."

Then he beckoned to California Joe, who was the nearest; and that personage came up at once, and said, with one of his free-and-easy laughs: "Waal, gin'ral, we got 'em, this time, and no mistake, ef they don't try to break aout in the night. I didn't take much conceit in what we was doing, till I seen the imps fairly caged; but naow I ruther calkilate we've got 'em w'ar the har's so short, they can't git aout of a squeeze."

The general put on his most freezing aspect, as he said:

"Joe, you are entirely too familiar. I want to consult you, and not to joke with you."

The face of the scout altered at once to an air of gravity, and he deliberately took out his pipe and began to fill the bowl, saying placidly:

"Fire away, gin'ral. Me and you is old friends, ye know, and it don't take long fur us to make up aour minds. What's the trouble?"

The general, who was naturally, and by acquired habits, the most dignified, if not stiff, of men, bit his lips at the free-and-easy way in which the scout acted; but he knew that Joe could not be daunted, and he began at once:

"The family of Mr. Vance is in the hands of the Indians; and some white men, I hear, are with them. If we attack the place, what, in your opinion, will be the fate of the prisoners?"

Joe looked him steadily in the eye, and then glanced uneasily at Vance.

"Look-a-hyar, gin'ral," he said. "You don't need to ax me that question; fur you know, as well as I do, what 'll happen. The Injuns 'll fight like so many wild-cats, and, when they find the jig's up, they 'll jest take it aout of the pris'ners."

"I don't like to talk that way, afore the lootenant, hyar; 'cause it's his folks is thar; but thar ain't no gittin' over facts."

George listened with a pale face. He had known it all the time; but the plain way in which Joe spoke, caused his heart to feel like a lump of lead in his breast.

Joe noticed the gloom of his face, and went on:

"But that ain't to say, gin'ral, that the ladies can't be got aout of the hands of the imps, when the thing's properly managed. Injuns is men, jest the same as we air; and they don't want to git killed, no more'n we do. Thar's a way to git them prisoners."

"And what is it?" asked George anxiously. Joe made no answer till he had drawn a match from his pocket and lighted the indispensable pipe. Then he puffed slowly for nearly a minute, during which the two officers watched him in silence, and at last said:

"You oughter know, gin'ral. Thar's only one way to git an Injun to give up a prisoner. You must buy 'em if you want 'em."

Old S. nodded.

"I know that. But in this case, we have one advantage we do not usually have. We have got their whole force into a trap, and they ought to be glad to be let out, if they give up the prisoners. How does that strike you, Joe?"

Joe shook his head.

"First ain't wuth shucks, gin'ral," he answered tersely. Then he puffed in silence.

The general seemed vexed.

"Why not, Joe; why not? Haven't we got them in a trap, fast and hard?"

"In one way ye have, gin'ral; in another ye haven't, and they ain't no man's darned fools, as you ought to know, by this time, gin'ral."

"Then what's the matter, Joe?"

"Thar's this the matter, that, ef they wants to git aout of this trap, in the night, they kin take thar choice of uther eend; and whar's yer sogers, when they gits at 'em in a night attack? I ain't sayin', gin'ral, but what the new men would fight; but they ain't like the old ones, and the Injuns might git up a stampede. If you want to git them prisoners, it's my apinion that some one oughter go to the Injuns, and git up a talk with 'em. Then we 'll know what to expect; and we won't, till that's done."

"Who will take the risk of going?" asked the general gravely. "You know, Joe that Indians are not apt to respect a flag of truce."

"I will go, general, if you have no objection," said George earnestly. "It is my affair, and no one else's. I am ready to take a flag to the Indians, and risk anything to save my family."

California Joe screwed up his face into a very singular expression.

"Lootenant," he said, "you've got lots of grit;

but thar ain't no more use, your gwine, than ef you was nobody at all. You don't understand a word of thar langwidge, and they mou't fool you out of everything, and keep you, inter the bargain onless ye had some one with ye, that understood the varmint's."

"Who, then, will go with me as interpreter?" asked George desperately. "I cannot stay in this state of uncertainty any longer."

The scout took a long puff of his pipe, the old general watching him keenly all the while out of the corner of his eye. He did not seem disposed to speak for some time; but at last he said:

"Lootenant, thar ain't more'n one chance in a hunderd, that we'll come aout of this scrape with our sculps; but, ef you want to take the risk, I'll go with ye, too."

General S. smiled with grave approval.

"Joe," he said, "you have done as I knew you would. If you succeed in your mission I will see that you are rewarded for the risk you run. It is a noble action you are about to do; for the family of Mr. Vance is nothing to you."

"Begging your parding, general," said the scout, "it's a good deal. Lootenant Vance and me, we've fit Injuns together, as might be, and I promised him I'd bring him help. He got out of the hobbie afore the help come; but, all the same me and him's got to see the hull programme through; and that's why I'm gwine with him. Ef you'll let us have a bugler and a flag, general, I'll be obliged to ye."

"You shall have anything you want, Joe; and, if it is necessary to promise a reward for the prisoners, your promise shall be made good."

"Thankee, gin'ral. I'll do the best I kin fur the guv'ment."

Then Joe turned to Vance, to say:

"Now, lootenant, thar's one thing I want unnerstood, and that is that I'm to do all the talkin' fur the two on us. I understand Injuns, and you don't; that's what's the matter."

"I'm perfectly willing to be guided by you," George said; "but there is a white man with them, an officer of the Confederate service. He may want to treat with me directly."

"Then you kin tell him that I'm the man, comes from Gin'ral S.; and that when the gin'ral give the biz inter my hands he meant it. That's flat, lootenant. Ef I'm to do this, I've got to do it alone."

"Joe is right," put in the general. "This Confederate officer, whoever he is, can have but a handful of men with him, and can have no voice in the negotiations. Joe understands the Indians, and it is them that we are treating with, and not the rebels."

Joe nodded an emphatic indorsement of the sentiment, observing approvingly:

"That's the talk, gin'ral, and don't nobody go to furgittin' of it."

Then he brought up his mule, and said to George, as coolly as if going for a ride:

"Whenever you're ready, lootenant, I am. 'Gin'ral, ef the bugler and flag was hyar, I'd go naow."

General S. called up a bugler, and a white flag was hastily made up from a handkerchief on a pole, which George took in his hand, when the two adventurers, accompanied by the bugler, who did not seem to like his mission at all, rode out from the main body of the little army, and proceeded straight toward the entrance of the bad lands.

As they neared the place, Joe kept his eyes roving over the defenses, and said to Vance in a low tone:

"Ef they feels desprit ugly they'll be mighty apt to fire at us and not let us come in at all, lootenant. It's a resky thing we're doin' and 'tain't no use denyin' it. Look at that, now!"

He pointed to the head of an Indian, which was raised over the edge of the ravine in front, apparently to take a survey of the party that bore the flag.

"Ef that red varmint don't fire at us, he wants to talk, lootenant," said Joe.

The nearer they got, the more nervous did the bugler become; for he was but a boy, and this was his first fight.

The scout observed his pale face, and said, in an encouraging tone:

"Don't git skeered, sonny. They won't shoot at you, while thar's better game to be faound. Thar, we've gone fur enough. Naow toot yer horn."

They halted, and the bugler raised his instrument, blowing a long blast.

The sound had not died away when the Indian, whose head had been seen, came boldly out from the shelter of the ravine, and made the signal of amity, at which Joe observed:

"Ay, ay, that shows they see they've got in a hoel, lootenant. When you corner an Injun, he's allers ready to talk. Don't go no further. It's my idee that the imps wants to git us foul, yit, and they don't do it, ef California Joe knows hisself."

He reined up his horse and made the counter signal of amity, following it with the Indian sign, requesting the other to come forward.

The Indian replied by the same sign, and the scout said quietly:

"Jest as I thought, lootenant. They want us to come in, so they kin have us in thar power. Naow, we'll see who's master."

Vance did not understand the rapid succession of silent signals that followed between the Indian and the scout.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HARD BARGAINS.

At last Joe said:

"The varmint wants me to come in and see the big chief, and I tell him that I want the big chief to come aout hyar. He says he'll go and see what the chief says. Between me and you, the big chief is right behind him, and it's only a trick to gain time."

But they've got to come to aour farms, or not at all."

The Indian, who had been carrying on the talk with his hands, here disappeared in the bowels of the earth, and there was a long wait, during which the young bugler got behind the two men who had brought him with them, and Joe laughed as he noticed the evidence of the boy's fear.

"Se hyar, sonny," he said, "ef the Injuns takes to firin' at us, we're all goners together, and it won't save ye to git behind no one. Best keep a stiff upper lip; for an Injun is mighty apt to think more of a man, ef he does it."

"Let the poor boy go back," said George kindly. "He has nothing at stake, and is not used to such danger."

Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"He ain't much use; that's a fact, lootenant, naow that he's done his tootin'; but ef we was to let him stir, we'd be mighty apt to git fired at. No tellin' what suspicious critters Injuns is, and they mou't think he was gwine to bring up the rest of the boys. No, sir, as long as he's come this fur, he mou't as well stay. They won't fire naow, or they'd ha' did it, long ago. Hyar comes the big chief, ef I ain't mistook."

As he spoke, they saw the heads of several men coming out of the ravine, and three dignified Indians, with their tall war-bonnets on their heads, their buffalo robes trailing on the ground, with all the stately trappings of the savage who wishes to make a great impression on another, came forward, accompanied by the Confederate captain, who wore his uniform.

All four were on foot, and Joe scanned them closely as they advanced.

"Keep yer eyes peeled, lootenant," he said, in an undertone, without looking toward George. "Git your pistol ready, in your hand, to draw, ef thar's the least sign of thar doin' the same. Tell ye, ye can't be too keerful with Injuns."

He stole his own hand down, and put his revolver ready to his hand, under his left thigh, as he sat in the saddle, and George followed his example, though he detected no sign of hostile intentions on the part of the Indians, who kept their buffalo-robes folded over their breasts, their hands displayed, as if to show that they were empty.

Rhett strode forward by the side of the man in the center, and had his revolver in his belt, ready to his hand, though his rifle was belted to his back, so that it could not be used without a little time."

"Now, lootenant," said Joe, in the same cautious tone, as the Indians came nearer, "I'm to do the talkin'—remember. That feller in gray acts like he wanted to talk to you, cause you've got officer's duds on, so you must think over a way to fool him."

"I will tell him that I have no powers to treat, and that all the negotiations must be made with you," said George, reassuringly.

Joe seemed to be satisfied with the answer, and in another moment the Indians came up, and Rhett opened the conversation by saying:

"Well, Lootenant Vance, you can't complain that I didn't treat you like a white man. If you've done with that mar' of mine, I'd like to have her back again."

This was an unexpected tack, and George glanced at the scout.

Joe nodded his head, as much as to say that the mare might be given up, and George said:

"I hardly anticipated that this would be the case, and brought no other horse. Will you let the bugler go back and get me one?"

Rhett hesitated.

"I don't see the necessity for that. We are on foot, as you see, and there is no reason why you should be mounted. I want my mare."

George glanced at Joe again, and the scout, with a smile, put in the remark:

"See hyar, Cap, ain't you a leetle rough on the lootenant? We come hyar with a flag, to talk, and you ain't accusing him of bein' a hoss-thief, I hope. That ain't the way fur one white man to talk to another."

Rhett colored slightly.

"I was not speaking to you," he said, "but to this officer. I am Captain Rhett, of the Confederate service, and I hold communication with officers only."

"This gentleman is an officer also," said Vance, who saw a frown on Joe's face. "He is chief of scouts for General S., who has sent him here with full powers to treat for surrender. I am merely a witness. As for the mare, here she is."

He dismounted as he spoke, and handed the bridle to Rhett, adding:

"I am very much obliged to you for having let me take her, as she has undoubtedly saved my life, though probably that was not your intention."

Rhett cast a quick suspicious glance at the Indian chiefs with him, as if he feared that they would understand what was said, and replied hastily:

"I didn't let you take her, man. You took her, and of course I can't blame you for it. But I never told you to take her, and if you were not here under a flag of truce, I would say you stole her; for that is the fact."

George smiled slightly, for he saw that the other was in a dilemma, for fear his allies should find out that he had been more merciful than they.

He said no more, but withdrew to one side, and left Joe to continue the interview, in a way to suit himself.

The scout, as soon as the mare had been given up, addressed himself to the Indian chiefs, who had been standing like statues during the short dispute, saying not a word.

He spoke rapidly, in the tongue of the Sioux, and

appeared to be making some proposition, to which they listened attentively, but manifested no sign of approval or disapproval.

Rhett listened, in a way that showed he did not understand what was going on, and at last spoke out impatiently:

"Look hyar, you, sir, whoever you air—"

"Californy Joe, at your sarvice," said Joe, in the most polite way in the world. "What kin I do fur you, Cap?"

"What are you telling these men? I don't understand their language, and the chief in the middle talks as good English as I do. I am a part of this force, and I don't want any negotiations going on, without I know what is asked for and granted."

"That's easy told," said Joe, placidly. "I've b'en tellin' the chiefs that we've got 'em foul, and that we air willin' to let 'em come aout, and fight us on the squar', or to suit themselves, but they must give up the white prisoners that you-uns hev got, hid away in the bad lands."

Rhett shrugged his shoulders.

"If that's all, you can hev them, for all me. I don't want them. But they won't give them up to you, if they wouln't do it for me."

Joe smiled slightly.

"Don't be too sure, Cap. You ain't included in the surrender, you know. We ain't treatin' with you-uns at all. We kin take keer of you. Haow many men hev you got to meet aour force? Not enough to stop one of aour comp'nies. It's the Injuns we talk to, and nobody else."

"Then we may as well break off the talk, right hyar," said Rhett angrily. "My allies won't desert me, I am sure; and the proposition is an insult." So saying, he turned on his heel, and was walking away in dudgeon, when the chief, who had been by his side called out in English:

"Hi! Stop! Injun talk! Gray man no good talk! Get plenty, much heap blanket, whisky, gun, powder, all sort, if give up white squaw. Stop!"

Then he turned to his comrades, and spoke, for the first time since the interview had commenced, with much gesticulation, as if he was expatiating on the offer he had received from the scout. They listened, in the same stolid fashion as before, but Vance and Joe, who were watching them intently, saw, from the gleam of their eyes, that their avarice was roused at the prospect of being bribed heavily to give up the prisoners. Joe, whenever the Indian paused, would put in a word in the Sioux language; which had its effect to banish their scruples, and at last the man who had done the most talking turned to Rhett, and took him aside, as if to have a private talk with him, and overcome what scruples he might have against the proposition.

California Joe, when Rhett had gone off, said to George Vance:

"I reckon the whisky fetched 'em, lieutenant. It fetches a heap of Injuns."

"What have you promised them?" asked Vance.

"I promised to give ten blankets for each of the men and women, a barrel of pork fur each man extra, and two more apiece fur the women. You know, lieutenant, they want to be paid high fur women folks, fur they've found out we don't like our women ill-treated. Then we're to give ten rifles, and a bar'l of powder, with a chunk of lead, as big as a man's head, to boot, fur the hull party; and when that didn't fetch, I threw in a bar'l of whisky, to make things squar'. I reckon they'll give up the pris'ners, and all's well that ends well."

He heaved a deep sigh as he spoke, the only evidence of the anxiety that he had been suffering during the negotiation, and added, in an undertone:

"I didn't think we'd git sich terms; but the walk-a-heaps has skeered 'em mighty, and that's a fact, or they wouldn't have gi'n up so easy."

The consultation between the Indians and Rhett here closed, and the Confederate captain came forward, to say, with an appearance of great cordiality:

"The thing is settled, Lieutenant Vance; and I'm glad of it."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SURRENDER.

GEORGE VANCE bowed silently, for he did not know what "the thing" was, and had promised not to interfere with California Joe.

He did not even ask what the terms were; but Joe relieved his suspense by talking at once.

"The thing's settled this-a-way, lieutenant. The Injuns says that if we wants to treat with them, we must let these Confed'rit gents, what's friends of tha's, go free; and I've said they kin. Fu'st, they air to have time to git a good start on the other side of the bad lands, and we air to bring the goods hyar before the mouth of the gulch, so that the Injuns kin see they ain't to be cheated of tha'r goods."

"But the prisoners—where are they to go?" asked Vance eagerly, without thinking.

California Joe frowned slightly, as if the question, before the Indians, displeased him.

"The prisoners," he said, "air to be brought to the same place, and give up to us when the goods is delivered, and not before. They air to be put in plain sight, and git back all they had when they was took, arms and all, so that thar mayn't be no foul play. But the Injuns won't give 'em up till they see the goods. As many Injuns as wants to scoot kin do so while the goods is bein' delivered, but not arter that. The fightin' is to stop till the prisoners is delivered, but arter that, both parties kin wade in all they want. That's the best terms we could git, lieutenant; and naow, the sooner we git back to the gin'ral, the better it will be fur us."

George saw from the expression of his face that

he wanted to get away from the Indians for some reason or other, and the young man took the hint and walked off.

The Indians followed his example, and California Joe remained in his saddle watching them till Vance had attained a safe distance.

Then he said to the little bugler:

"Naow, sonny, scoot the best ye know haow!"

The boy needed no second bidding, and galloped away after the officer, Joe following more leisurely, and frequently looking back, as if he feared something from his rear.

When he at last put spurs to his mule and rode into the presence of the troops, he went up to General S. and held a short but animated consultation with him before George Vance could get up to them.

When the young officer came up, he heard the old general say:

"Well, Joe, I promised that you should have your own way, and I shall keep my word; but I'll have no risks taken."

"Thar ain't no resk abaout it, gin'ral," said the scout earnestly. "It's the only way we kin git an inside holt on the varmints, and beat 'em at tha'r own game. I tell ye, gin'ral, ef ye let 'em off this time, thar won't be no livin' on the plains fur an or'nary white man. Thar's enough stuff in the wagons to do it ten times over, and then we'll have 'em squar'. Cap Colville kin do the hull biz easy."

The general frowned and twitched, as if uneasy in his mind, but he said, in a resigned sort of way, as he turned his horse:

"Well, if harm comes of it, we shall have the infantry to fall back on. I'll do what you advise; but I won't have any fighting if it can be helped."

George was puzzled and alarmed at the mystery that appeared to exist between the general and his trusted chief of scouts; but he was more alarmed when California Joe took him to one side and told him what was the scheme on hand.

"Lootenant Vance," he said, in a manner that showed more gravity than George had ever seen him exhibit before. "Thar's a heap more deviltry a-goin' on than you think of. Them Injuns is made up tha'r minds to git squar' with you fur havin' got the best of 'em, and they think they've pulled the wool over my eyes, too. But ef all goes as I want it, they ain't gwine to fool us so bad."

Then he told him that he had detected a sign, from one of the Indians to another, that he had known as belonging to a secret society that exists on the plains, something in the order of the secret societies of civilization, and of which he, California Joe, had been made a member years before. This sign, recognized, had put him in communication with the Indians at once, in a way that nothing else could have done, and had gained their confidence. He had ascertained, from this beginning, that the Indians were tired of their white allies, and wanted to get rid of them, so the Confederates were to be allowed to retreat unmolested.

They were willing to give up the prisoners for the handsome bribe offered them; but Joe felt sure, from the way they acted, that there was some treacherous design concealed behind all this, and that, unless the soldiers were prepared to storm the ravines, on the first sign of treachery, there would be trouble.

"The end of it all is this, lieutenant," he added.

"The gin'ral he's gwine to go back and git up the wagons, with the goods for the Injuns; and the cal'v'ry is to come up, as close as the officers dar' take 'em, while the Injuns is gittin' aout on the plains. We're to go in as they come aout, and that's the place whar the Injuns hopes to ketch us nappin'. That's the very place whar we is to ketch them, if we work the thing right. Naow, lieutenant, air you grit?—I don't mean that, nuther, fur I know ye air, or ye wouldn't have did what ye have—but air ye real grit, to stand in the middle of a crowd of Injuns, all alone, while they bring aout yer father and mother, and trust me to bring help, when the red devils makes a rush, as thur' gwine to do?"

"I think I am," said George slowly; "but tell me what it is you expect."

"I expect that the Injuns will bring aout the prisoners and git tha'r goods fur them, and then, while the sogers is away, try to raise a muss, and git back the prisoners, arter they've took the goods inter the bad lands. That's wha's the scheme, as nigh as I kin make aout, and the man that stands by the prisoners will have a mighty good chance of losin' his skulp. Lootenant, ye see I don't deceive ye. Ef you air skeered to take the job, I'll take it myself; but I've got to bring in the boys, at the proper moment, and you c'u'dn't jedge that as well as me."

Vance compressed his lips as he answered:

"It needs no excuse, Joe. If there is a man in the world whose business it is to stand by his father and mother, and keep them from danger, it is myself."

The scout stretched out his hand:

"Lootenant, you're good grit; and thar ain't many men, as I've found in the world, that air. I'll do the best I kin; but I ain't sayin' but what the resk is a great one."

Then he handed George both the revolvers out of his belt, saying:

"They'll put the pill whar they're hilt, lieutenant; and that's more'n you kin say fur every pistol on the plains. Keep a stiff upper lip, and do the best ye kin, while I do the rest."

Then he strode away, and George noticed that he had not said, as he had when he first met him, that he would "bring help in time." The danger, whatever it might be, appeared to be one that even the presence of the veteran scout could not provide against.

Then Vance put the pistols into his belt, the addition making three in all, and walked out of the camp toward the ravine, as he had been told by Joe.

The Indians had all departed from the ravine in his front, to all appearance, and he could see them streaming out of the other end of the bad lands, while the troops at that end of the trap, into which the Indians had been drawn, were being taken out of the way.

Thus the advantage which General S. had gained in a military point of view, by caging his birds, was now being thrown away, through the negotiations of California Joe; and Vance could not but see that the old general had made a great sacrifice, for the sake of getting the prisoners into his hands, *alive*.

But would they come in alive? That was the question which was, of all others, the most pressing in his mind, and he felt his heart torn with anxiety, as long as it hung doubtful in the balance. There was no sign of any one in his front; but he could not tell but what a hundred concealed marksmen were aiming at him, where he stood. Then he heard the rumbling of wagons, and saw several white-tipped vehicles, coming up toward the ravine in his front. General S. had disappeared; but Captain Colville had brought the cavalry near by, and scattered it about the side of the bad lands, where the men had been dismounted, and were lounging about, near their horses, as if unconcerned spectators of what was going on.

But as the wagons rumbled up, there was a change in the scene, as, first one and then quite a little party of Indians, came out from the recesses of the bad lands, and seemed to be waiting for the arrival of the stores, with great eagerness.

Colville rode up to Vance, and said to him, in a low tone, before the Indians could get near:

"It is all left to you now. If they demand to have the stores issued, say that you can do nothing till you see the prisoners."

Then the Indians came up, and Colville rode off, without giving any more specific information, leaving George to face the brunt of the negotiation.

Up came a big Indian, who said in broken English:

"Wantee whisky. Ugh!"

"You can't have any, till I see the prisoners," said George sternly. "Get out of here, if you don't want to get hurt."

He threw off the savage with violence adding:

"No prisoner, no whisky! Do you hear?"

The Indian eyed him with glowing orbs for a second or two, as he was disposed to fight, there and then; but thought better of it, as he saw the resolute front of the young officer, and the weapons with which his belt was bristling. He withdrew, with an air of sullenness, and went back to his friends, while George waved his hand to the head wagoner, who was coming up, at which signal the man stopped at once, not by any means sorry, apparently, to have the excuse. The cavalymen began to move forward, near the ravine, as if without premeditation, and the Indian, who had been so familiar, burst out into a laugh, and cried out:

"White man 'fraid too muchee! Here come white man and squaw."

He raised both hands to his lips, and uttered a long cry, which seemed to be a signal; for, at its sound, out of the ravine came quite a crowd of Indians, and, in the midst of them, George saw, with an emotion he could not restrain, his father and mother and Mabel, all safe and sound, with honest Tom Biggs bringing up the rear.

The start he gave, and the anxious expression on his face, was not lost on the keen-sighted Indians, watching them like cats, and the same man, who had before been so rude, came up to him with a smile on his face, saying, in the sweetest of tones:

"Wantee see squaw? Come in. No hurtee you. You big chief. Hey?"

At another time George would have been suspicious of the sudden cordiality; but at the moment he was too much over come by the sight of his family to reason coolly. Without thinking what he was doing, he advanced, and his mother saw him and rushed forward to meet him, crying:

"George, George, my darling boy! Are you safe at last?"

That cry made him forget everything else, and he walked quickly forward, the Indians giving way to him, with smiles on their faces, as he went into the trap they had set.

He forgot what might be the danger into which he was running, till he found his mother's arms round him, and heard the voice of Tom Biggs, crying:

"Praise the Lord! Hallelue! Hallelue! The lootenant's safe, and we've got aour weepins, and naow, ye darned skunks, ye don't ketch us in a hoel again!"

Then George heard the rapid gallop of a horse, and the voice of California Joe, yelling:

"Look aout, lootenant! The varmints is layin' fur ye!"

Then he saw that the Indians were drawing pistols and bending bows.

CHAPTER XX.

INDIAN FAITH.

BEFORE California Joe could reach the place where they were gathered, at the mouth of the ravine, a scream of terror from the lips of Mrs. Vance announced that enemies were in the rear, and a storm of bullets came whistling over the heads of the people who were eagerly gazing at the coming of the soldiers.

Then there was a confused struggle, in which George Vance was only sensible that his mother was in danger. He saw the whole of the ravine full of

Indians, on foot, who were rushing on, firing as they came, while his father, with his gray locks flying, and his eyes wild, was rushing before his wife, gun in hand.

Before George could get clear of his mother's entangling arms the old man had got in front of them all, and was firing his gun at the Indians, with a steady aim, that told on the dense group ahead, with fearful effect.

They dropped, one on the other; but the rest came on, and as the young man reached his father, he saw the elder Vance stagger and fall, while a yell of triumph was raised by the savages, who came on like a tempest.

George fired shot after shot by the body of his father, and heard the sound of a rifle by his side, as he felt a sharp pain, where a bullet struck him.

The next minute the Indians were on him, and he was firing right and left, with his revolver, into their faces.

How the contest terminated he did not know: but he had a dim sense that the Indians were giving back, and that something else was transpiring round him. Then came a blank, and he felt himself falling, as it seemed to him, from a vast height, with a shock that was terrible.

Then all was dark, and he knew no more.

When he opened his eyes, he was out in the prairie, with the blue sky overhead, and was surrounded by soldiers and scouts, while California Joe's voice was saying, in a low, hushed way, near him.

"Better so. The old gentleman died like a man, and he wouldn't want to live, arter this."

A dim idea that something had happened made George open his eyes and try to raise his head, when he saw California Joe, in the midst of the scouts, a number of soldiers gathered, in a group, round something that was on the ground, at their feet.

With a great effort (for he felt stiff and sore, with a burning pain in his head) he rose on his elbow, and tried to speak:

"Mabel—where is she? Joe, my God! Have they killed her?"

"Don't ye worry over her," said the kind-hearted scout, soothingly, as he supported the young officer, who was not able to stand alone yet. "The young lady warn't hurt. She showed a darned sight better pluck nor some men. Arter the Injuns got you down, and was gwine to take yer skulp, she stood over your body and fired away, with a pa'r of revolvers, as fast as a man c'd hev pulled the triggers. Lord love ye, lieutenant, that's a gal wuth her weight in gold; she is."

"Where is she?" asked Vance, faintly.

Then there was a movement in the group in front of him, and it opened, revealing a sight that brought a cry of amazement and agony from the young man.

There, on the ground, knelt Mabel, and by her were stretched three bodies, covered with coarse blankets.

The sight seemed to give him strength to go forward, leaning on the arm of the faithful Joe, and the girl caught sight of him as he came.

She lifted her face, and he saw that it was deadly pale.

"Mabel," he hoarsely whispered. "What is it? What has happened?"

"Oh, George," she said, in a dreary way, "I could not help it. I did what I could, but the Indians were too quick for me. We are alone now, dear. We have made our journey in vain."

Then, as he stood bewildered, not yet understanding what she meant, she pointed to the dead bodies, covered with the blankets, and, at a sign from Joe, one of the scouts uncovered the faces.

And then George Vance saw the pale, rigid features of his father and mother, while the honest lineaments of Tom Biggs lay beside them.

Then he knew what she meant by their being "alone together."

The soldiers, with the delicacy of their rough but honest natures, withdrew, and the young man, nervously by his great sorrow to strength enough to stand, put away the arm of California Joe, and said, quietly:

"Leave us alone for awhile, if you please."

Then he went to Mabel's side, and put his arm round her, saying:

"We are all alone, dear, you and I, but we are spared to share each other's sorrow. Tell me, if you can, how it happened."

She put her hand to her head in a bewildered way at the question.

"I don't know. I cannot tell. All I know is that I saw the wretches coming, and you went to save your father. Then I saw him fall by mother, and the Indians rushed to scalp them both. I saw you going too, and I don't know what it was made me. I did not think I could have done it, but I did. And then all I remember is that I stood there, firing as fast as I could, and then you went down, and I thought it was all over—"

Here she stopped and covered her face with her hands, shuddering so violently that he did not ask her any more.

Presently she took her hands from her face and said, in a low, faint voice:

"I shall never be able to look on an Indian again without shuddering. Oh, the cruel, merciless wretches!"

"Then let us come away," he said, softly. "This is no place for you, and now the soldiers are up, I will attend to the rest."

He raised her, feeling strangely strong as he did so, for his wound had been but a graze on the head by a bullet, and he had escaped further injury by the sudden irruption of the scouts and soldiers, who

had rushed into the ravine pell-mell after the retreating Indians.

As they turned to leave the spot he cast the first glance he had been capable of taking over the landscape, and saw that the soldiers were round the bad lands at both ends, while the sounds of firing in the bowels of the earth showed that the battle was not over yet by any means.

Indians in little groups were hovering about the prairie, and another long line of troops coming over the swell, glittering with bayonets, round the white wagons.

California Joe was watching the Indians with a keen regard, but as the young officer turned away from the bodies, supporting the lady, the scout came forward, to say respectfully:

"The gin'ral's ambulance will be along direckly, lieutenant, and the lady won't hev to walk. Hyar it comes naow."

He pointed to a six-mule team that was coming at a gallop over the plain, drawing an ambulance, escorted by a troop of horsemen, and in a short time it dashed up, and the face of General S. looked out, while the owner of the face demanded, sternly:

"Where is Captain Colville? How dared he disobey my orders?"

California Joe winked at the other scouts, as he answered:

"I were near the cappen, gin'ral, and I kin sw'ar we didn't hyar no orders, arter the ones you give at startin'."

The old officer stared at Joe with a stern face, but the unabashed scout returned the glance without wavering; and the general continued:

"Where is he? Can't you answer?"

"Reckin the cappen is out yonner, at the other eend of the bad lands, gin'ral. We had a high old time gittin' in at this eend, and we wouldn't hev did it, as it was, ef it hadn't been fur Lieutenant Vance, hyar, and his party, that fou't 'em like heroes. We've give 'em a good whippin' this time, gin'ral, and no mistake. Ye needn't be afeard to trust the cal'ny boys no more naow. They've had what the deacons calls tha'r baptizement of blood to-day."

The old general listened with more patience than might have been expected from a man of his haughty and irascible temperament.

As Joe mentioned the young officer, he turned his glance on Vance, and then on the girl by his side.

"And who is the lady, then?" asked the old general, doubtfully.

CHAPTER XXI. CONCLUSION.

GEORGE VANCE himself answered the query, with an air of some stiffness.

"The lady is my cousin and promised wife, Miss Fay, general. I will only ask you to provide for her safety, and then permission to go on with your men and finish the campaign against those Indians in the bad lands. I have been through them and know where to strike."

The general looked at him, with the blood not yet dried on the side of his face.

"But you are in no condition to fight to-day. You are wounded."

"I can fight as well as any one, and I am going to fight, if only for one thing, general."

"And what is that, sir?"

Vance pointed to the bodies that lay near by.

"To avenge the murder of my father and mother," he answered.

The old general started violently.

"Good heavens, and I did not know it! Here, some of you men, come and take up those bodies at once and have them taken to the rear out of danger. Sir, I apologize. You shall go where you please, and I will see that the lady is taken the best care of."

And the general began to bustle about like a man of twenty, leaping out of his ambulance and giving orders to everybody near by, while Vance turned to California Joe, and said in a low tone full of meaning:

"Now I am ready. We have waited too long. Let us not give a man in those ravines a chance to escape."

California Joe nodded as one well pleased, and led the way into the ravine that had proved so fatal to the Vance family.

As they went, they passed by a quantity of abandoned weapons, and the scout remarked:

"We come in, jest in time. That No' Cal'ny man fit like a good one. He 'twas that got in front of the lady, when they was almost a-ketchin' of her, and give it to 'em good, with that old shotgun of his'n. Say, lieutenant, d'ye know what his last words was to me when we found him, all shot to pieces, with all them dead Injuns raound him?"

"No," said Vance, absently.

"Says he, as we come up and passed him, and the reds gwine like sixty—says he, a-wavin' of his old gun, says he—'Shotguns forever! Haow's that, Tennessee?' And with that, he were gone. I tell ye what it is, lieutenant, tha'r air a good many as dies in tha'r beds, don't deserve Heaven half so much as that man. He didn't squeal onst; he fit like a hull team of wild-cats; and that's the kinder man to tie to, in this world or the next. Hyar the varmints air, at last."

The sound of rapid firing in front announced that they were coming nigh the scene of conflict, and, in a few minutes more, they had turned the corner of a bank, and saw the space, in front, full of men in blue, lying down and firing their carbines; while the incessant flashes of fire-arms, on the other side, and the whistle of bullets round their ears, as they advanced, showed that the Indians, who had taken refuge in the bad lands, were making a stubborn defense, in spite of the odds against them.

"How many do you suppose got in here?" asked Vance, as he threw himself down in shelter, and brought to the front a rifle he had picked up.

"Abaout a hunnerd; not more, I shed say, but the cusses fight like a streak, ef ye give 'em a place to hide tha'r heads."

It was California Joe who spoke, and his eyes were roving over the field, all the time, trying to discover something at which he could fire.

They lay there for near an hour, without any change in the aspect of things, when a noise behind them caused Joe to say:

"Look aout, lieutenant; hyar comes the walk-a-heaps. Naow we'll see fun, you bet."

George Vance looked back, and saw infantry soldiers coming along the path, at the bottom of the ravine.

As they reached the line where the cavalry dismounted men were lying, they threw themselves down by their sides, and Vance asked the officer who accompanied them:

"What are you going to do?"

"We've got to drive the red devils out of the bad lands," was the answer, in a grumbling way. "I wish the old general had to do it himself. He wouldn't be so ready to tell other men."

The officer was a green young man, who had never been in action before; and Vance, to comfort him, observed:

"It won't be so difficult as you might think. There are only about a hundred of them, and the troops have them surrounded. If the general told you to drive them out from this side, you may know that he has men on the other side, as well as this."

The young man nodded his head, gloomily.

"Ay, ay, that is all very well for you, but I guess you won't share the rush with us. You scouts don't fancy this close work."

Vance frowned slightly.

"You have made one mistake, young gentleman. I am an officer of the regular army; and when the advance is sounded, you will see me at the head of the men."

Almost as he spoke, a violent fire was raised at the other side of the Indians, and the officer of infantry shouted:

"Now, then, men, give them blazes!"

He jumped up as he spoke, and fell, almost at the word, with a bullet through his brain, when his men, who had risen, sunk again and refused to go forward till Vance leaped up, shouting:

"Follow me, then!"

He led them on, in the midst of a tempest of bullets; but, at the same time, the noise in front grew louder and louder, and the whole of the Indians made their appearance in a disorderly mob, rushing toward them.

From that moment the fight became a confused struggle, in which the Indians, after they had emptied their guns, fought with their knives and lances, with the desperation of wild beasts, while the lines of soldiers, coming in from all sides, with bayonets and pistols, made the interior of the ravines a perfect pandemonium, for a while.

At last it was over, and Vance found himself by California Joe, who was wiping the blood from his cheek, where it had been grazed by a knife, but the last of the Indians lay dead in the bottom of the ravine, and the soldiers had full possession of the place.

Three weeks have passed since the great fight in the bad lands, and the scene is changed to the interior of Fort Blake, to which the volunteers, who went on the campaign, have returned, after such a chastisement of the savages, for their outrages on the frontier, as kept them quiet for many a long year after.

Cautious General S., who had been so much berated by the reporters for his slowness, and his reluctance to trust the volunteers in the field, against men so much their superiors in individual fighting, had yet made his mark after all.

The party that had taken refuge in the bad lands contained several chiefs and many famous warriors, of whom most had been killed, while twenty surrendered, in the hope of saving their lives, and were sentenced to be hung in the fort, in the presence of all the Indians who had not left their reservation to engage in the massacres.

The execution of the twenty men, who were hung, did more to discourage the Indians from going on the war-path, than the death of three times the number, by the bullet, in the bad lands.

The war in Minnesota had terminated almost as soon as it commenced, and was lost sight of in the greater magnitude of the battles and sieges going forward at the time in the Eastern States, but the memory thereof did not fade from the minds of the settlers in Minnesota for many a long year.

From George Vance and his wife, for he and Mabel were married in the chapel of the fort, soon after their return from the front and the decent interment of the bodies slain in the battle—the trials and bloody ending of their perilous flight from Arkansas to Minnesota never faded into forgetfulness.

George Vance lived to see many a stricken field, and rose to high rank in the volunteer service; but all the battles he went through, in the momentous conflict, never caused him to forget the time when he and his wife had seen their father and mother butchered before their eyes.

To this day the name of an Indian causes the face of Mrs. Vance to turn paler, and her husband has moved away from the West, so that he may never again see one of the race that robbed him of all his family, in two short minutes.

THE END.

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